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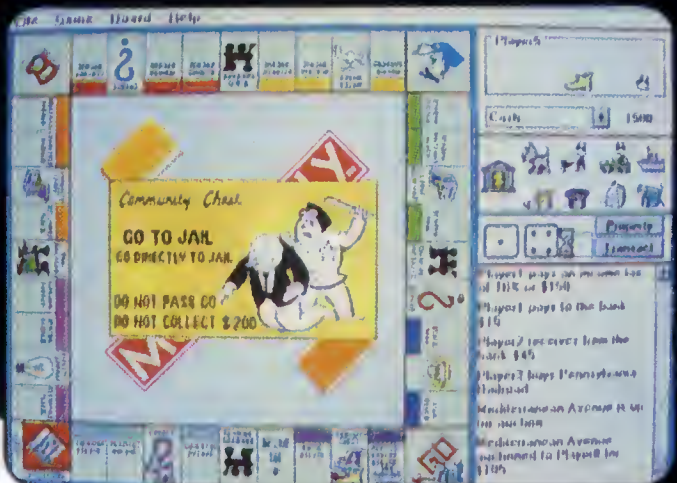
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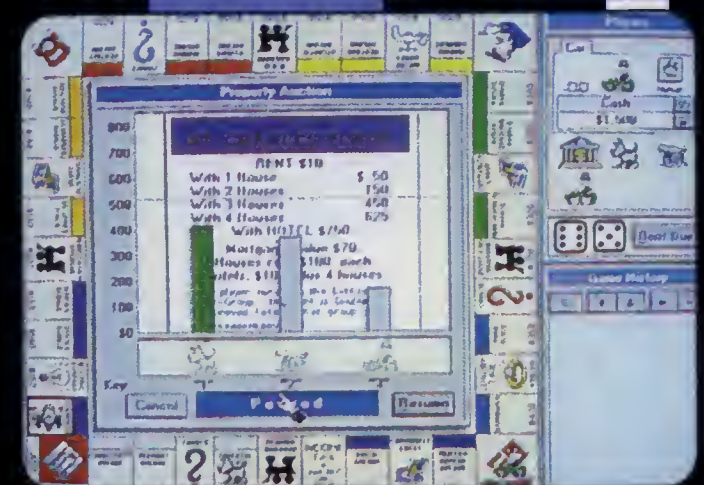
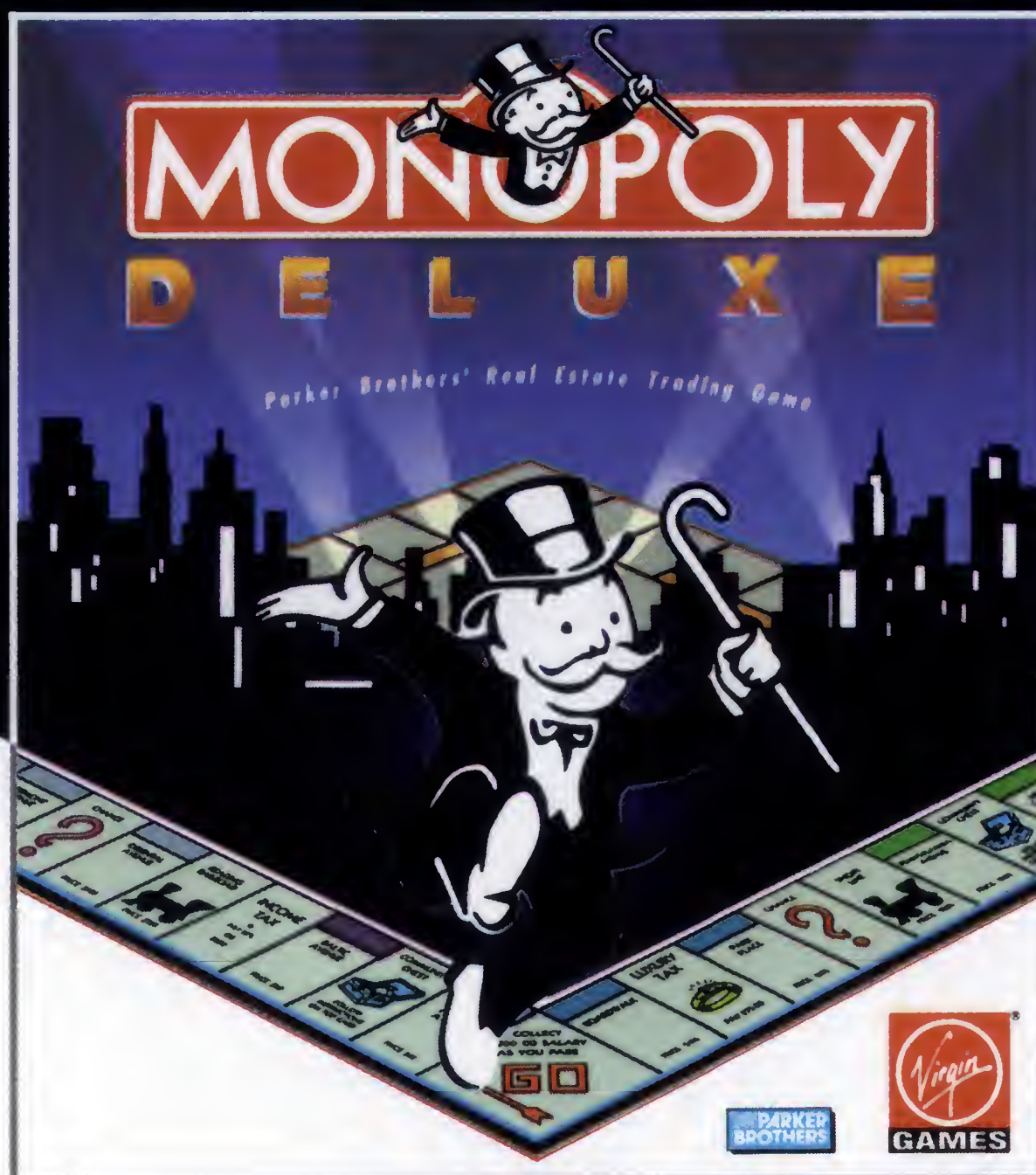
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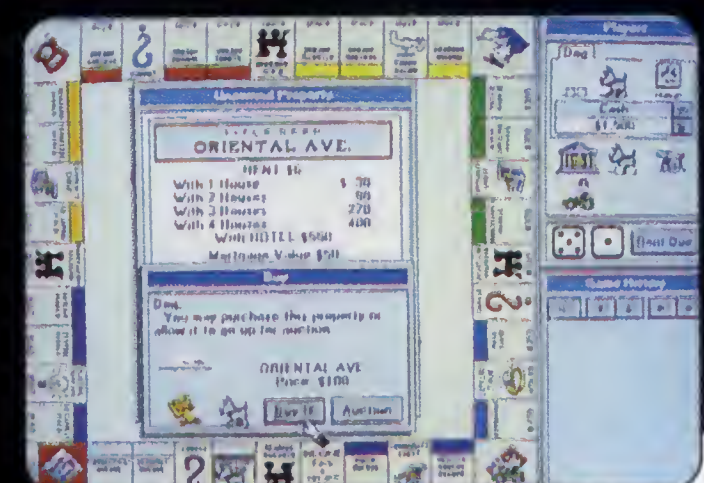
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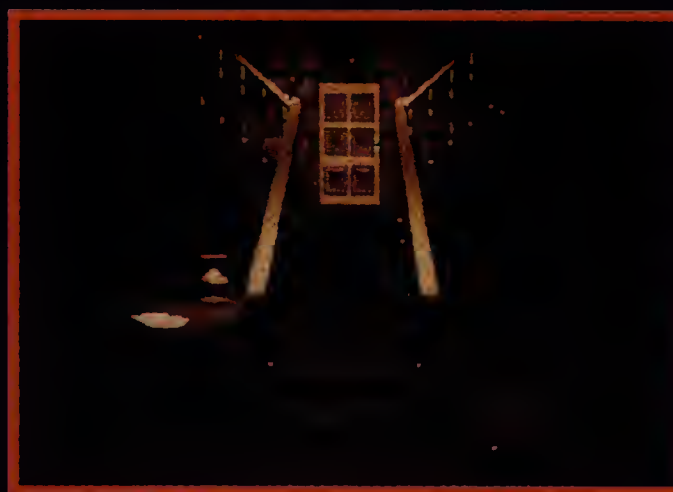
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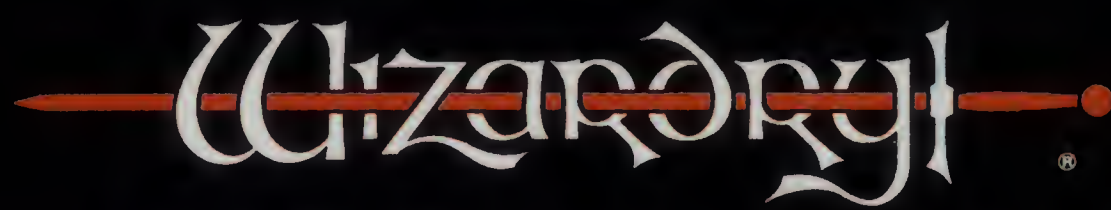
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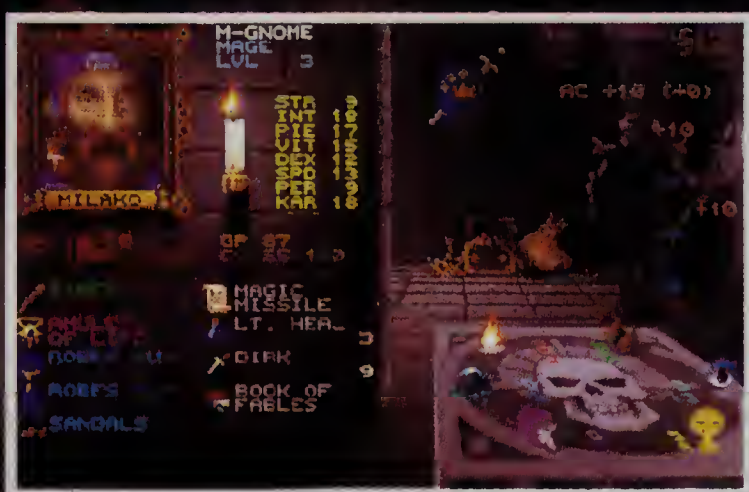
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COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

T A K I N G F U N S E R I O U S L Y

February 1993

Number 27

Highlights



Strike Commander: heading your way



V for Victory: Game of the Year



Front Page Football: dynamic!

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Kill the critics

Readers may think that software companies hype their games but believe me, compared to other industries the ads for leisure software are positively restrained. Has anyone ever noticed that no matter how bad a film/record/book, someone, somewhere, will have a good word to say about it, and that these same good words end up being quoted in ads for the particular item?

This was brought to mind when I went to see a recent film, an alleged thriller where the biggest thrill was seeing the final credits roll. All in all, a piece of work that was utterly abysmal and one in which the mike even appears in shot in a couple of scenes. It would seem, therefore, that only the patron saint of Hollywood could have a kind word to say about such a catastrophe. But no. According to someone called Susan Granger of WICC, the film is 'a slick, smart, edge-of-the-seat suspense thriller.' If a publisher brought out a book consisting of nothing but blank pages, I'd bet money that the subsequent ad for the empty tome would contain a quote describing it as 'a perfectly bound masterpiece.'

Much of this nonsense has to do with the insecurity of the target market. This is especially true of the theatre where most Broadway audiences wouldn't know a good play from a 42nd St pothole. They need the critics to tell them. Like characters in a Henry James novel, the would-be sophisticates need assurance. If the critics say it's bad, they are believed.

Contrast this with the software biz where negative reviews seem to have little effect on sales, despite what we like to think. *Strategy Plus* can say: 'I haven't seen a turkey this big since thanksgiving' and the game will continue to sell (are our readers mad?), but in the theatrical world such a notice would spell instant doom. Equally the converse is true. If one of our reviewers suffered a temporary psychotic attack and reported that Piggy Bank Massacre is 'a slick, edge-of-the-chair adventure,' would everyone rush out and buy it? Oh sure. Hold back the crowds.

But why the difference between this and the obedience to which theatrical and literary critics are accustomed, especially considering that sycophancy and nepotism are not exactly unknown in such quarters? The answer is knowledge. Most software users are smart. Being told something is good simply reaffirms what was known already. Negative reviews merely seem to inspire defiance - 'Those fools! They're wrong, I'll show 'em.' Either way, independence rules the roost and I for one would not want it any other way.

Crystal balls up

This is the time of the year when most editors produce a wish list of things they would like to see happen in the new year. Space filling predictions are another old editorial seasonal stand-by. But not here. 'What a smug creep,' you're probably saying. Maybe, but the truth is I'm no smarter than anyone else in this business and if *anything* is certain in life it's that no one else has a clue what's happening either. The 'nobody knows anything' maxim could have been coined with the software business specifically in mind.

But of course the uncertainty of it all is half the fun. After all, there's absolutely no guarantee that one year from now we won't be sat in the den wearing helmets and goggles with our minds far away in some virtual world. A startling prospect for our loved ones who have only just got used to 'monitor madness.' My advice is to prepare them already. Buy a pair of goggles, put on a more manic expression than usual, and then start making irregular swaying movements when next at the dinner table. (Imagine that rather than devouring your daily bread you are, in fact, hovering around Planet Pluto whacking aliens). This should give your dearest a taste of things to come. The Boy Scouts say 'be prepared.' They are right. Happy New Year. □

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Down the upgrade path

SSI

Spelljammer upgrade. Follow the on-screen prompts once installed

Bethesda Softworks

Wayne Gretzky Hockey 3 update to version 1.10. This version fixes CH FlightStick and other throttle control (non-standard) joysticks. Scoring and penalties have been adjusted. For more specific information and additional fixes see the README file. Another upgrade for **WGH3** involves the VOC file which was left out of the first version. Copy this file to the **WGH3\Sound** directory.

Sierra On-Line

Quest for Glory III

'B' patch. Corrects all known gameplay errors.

Lance Haffner Games

Full Count Baseball V. 5.1 Upgrade

This is the update to bring 'Full Count' up to 5.1. Included are new LOADER.TBC and PROGRA files. This update features expanded play-by-play and a new screen layout which is greatly improved.

Merit Software

Tom Landry Strategy Football V. 1.02.

This patch deals with modem play, excessive penalties, Sound Blaster problems, and improved animation choreography.

Dark Seed update to Version 1.5.

This updates **Dark Seed** to version 1.5 from any previous version.

NovaLogic

Comanche: Maximum Overkill Update to V1BB. This executable



Battlecruiser 3000 AD 360!

The 'lone wolf' game **Battlecruiser: 3000 AD** which was previewed in this magazine only a few centuries ago (issue 18 if you must know), has been signed to top wargame publisher Three Sixty Pacific. The game which combines strategy, resource management, and flight simulation, represents Three Sixty's first venture into the latter territory.

'**Battlecruiser**' will contain over 50 strategic missions that will comprise a campaign based upon locating and destroying the Gammulan homeland. Along the way, personnel must be recruited, and new equipment purchased. Four different flight models will be featured that will include 3D Goraud rendering and photo realistic ray-traced graphics. Although the basic game will be in VGA, an SVGA upgrade will be available separately. The game will offer modem play and will be supported by a series of expansion disks. The anticipated release date for all this is April.



Legend Has It

The latest role-playing game to use the fashionable 3D scrolling graphics is **Legends of Valor** from SSI. A quick look shows why this mode is becoming so popular. Quite apart from appearing very pretty, the 3D scrolling provides the smoothest free flowing interface yet. In particular the zoom mode is extremely effective, allowing close-ups of objects without loss of detail. Although similar in look to Origins **Underworld**, '**Legends**' has been under development in the UK (where it will be released by US Gold) for the past two years.

The game is a single character adventure set in Mitteldorf, a huge 28 square mile town set in a land nobody has ever heard of. Monsters, hostile inhabitants, dungeons, real-time combat, mazes and puzzles, all combine to complete the scenario which SSI estimate should provide over 40 hours of entertainment.



World Circuit's PC Engine

Microprose's Formula One game, **World Circuit**, should be available for the PC as you read this. The Amiga version was reviewed in issue 18. Although the review was generally favorable, some of the criticisms voiced in that review (and elsewhere) appear to have been taken on board in the PC version. For example, the controversial 'line magnet' which gave drivers a 'helping hand' around corners, has now been relegated to optional status. Overall, the game looks to have shaken off the 'easy' tag that the Amiga version acquired.

The modem option is not available in the current version but will come as part of an upgrade later this year. The VGA graphics are excellent, as is the frame rate. The cars emit a rather sad sounding whine, but this approximates exactly how they do sound as they fly round corners before disappearing into the pale blue yonder. Like just about everything else in the game, the animations can be adjusted in the options menu. Team and driver names can be edited, while the car itself can be customised according to player preference. Although there aren't exactly an abundance of F1 games, **World Circuit** looks set to emulate the Williams team by beating the opposition out of sight.

Sprint into space

Product placement in movies has long been commonplace, but now Sierra On-line plan to introduce the concept into games. In the upcoming release of **Space Quest V: The Next Mutation**, the logo of the Sprint telephone network will appear on the high-tech communications equipment used by the game's main character, Roger Wilco. The Sprint logo will also appear in the demo which is scheduled to run nationwide. While doubtless this is a smart marketing tac, its immediate benefit to the consumer is less clear and could even lead to some incongruous sights. For example, imagine being engaged in a

tense dogfight in say, **Aces Over Europe**, and a United Airlines jet just happens drift across the screen.

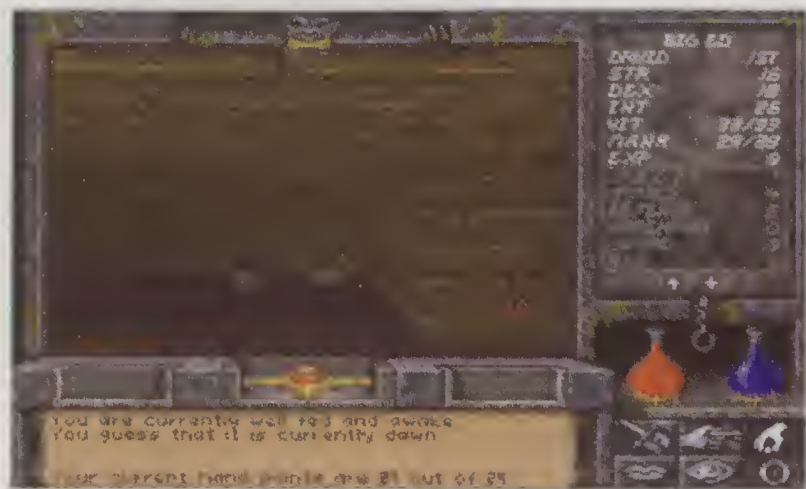
Considering that is an official arrangement, Sierra will doubtless not suffer the indignity incurred when they last tried to incorporate a 'real world' item into one of their games. This happened when a likeness of the rock band ZZ Top appeared in an early version of **Space Quest V**, whereupon the wild men of rock turned to their corporate lawyers and instructed them to sue unless the offending image was removed. Which, it may be noted, it duly was.

Whoops

Contrary to our report in our last issue, ownership of **V for Victory: Utah Beach** is not necessary to play the latest set of scenarios in the series, **Velikiye Luki**. This is a stand-alone game but one which updates the **V for Victory** master program to 2.0. The 1.0 and 1.1 versions of **Utah Beach** will not run under the 2.0 upgrade. A separate upgrade for **Utah Beach** to correct this is available from Three Sixty to registered users for \$5.

In issue 26 we incorrectly reported that Electronic Arts had bought Origin Systems for \$35. Unfortunately this led to a number of readers attempting to place late bids for the company, with some even going as high as \$50. The correct figure, of course, was \$35m Please accept our apologies for any disappointment caused by this error.

Underworld II Expands



Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds



Strike Commander: 'soon'

In these days of perpetual slippage, it's nice to report the release of a game that not only arrives on time, but early. **Underworld II: Labyrinth of Worlds** should be available as you read this. The main difference between this and its predecessor is that it now offers a non linear environment. Dungeons that prove too difficult to master first time around will have to be revisited after knowledge of the secret has been obtained elsewhere. As the 3D world appears to get bigger and more complex, so the player's choices

expand, as do those of the NPC.

The goodies (and baddies) that were present in the first game have been considerably expanded. Rivers, ice, and weapons whose performance depend on quality and lighting levels have been included to maximize the realism and detail. Look out for some tips on **Underworld II** in our next issue.

In the 'seeing is believing, hearing is deceiving' department, we understand that Origin's **Strike Commander** should be available 'soon.'

SSG get constructive

The construction kit for **Carriers at War** will be released this month by SSG. The kit will allow all aspects of a CAW scenario to be edited, or new scenarios to be created from scratch. Any part of an existing CAW can be changed through the construction kit. Ships and squadrons can be added or removed. Details such as armanent, range or other ratings can be changed. Ship and plane histories can be altered, and new ship or plane classes added.

In addition to the numerical details of a scenario, the Construction Kit will allow full access to the WarRoom AI plans for each scenario. WarRoom controls almost all aspects of the computer's play, and a few minor changes in WarRoom could radically alter how a scenario plays. WarRoom also provides easy methods for adding or subtracting individual ships or

even entire Task Groups from a scenario.

By using the power of the WarRoom system, it becomes very easy to create scenario variants capable of delivering surprises, and preventing human players from becoming complacent. The Construction Kit will allow the importing of new graphics for maps, ships and planes. It will also contain a number of addition scenarios, one of which will be used as a fully worked example of how to create an entire new scenario.

Lurking in the background at HQ SSG is **Warlords 2**. Nobody's handing out release dates on this but we can reveal it will contain the following enhancements to the original game.

- Improved movement system
- A better class of opponent
- Multiple maps

More news on **Warlords 2** soon.

Austria Condemns Racist Games Shock!

Austrian computer professionals are asking fellow workers around the world to condemn inhumane, malicious, demeaning computer games. The Austrian Computer Society has submitted a resolution to the 1992 General Assembly of the International Federation for Information Processing. It reads: 'Computer games are among the most frequently used programs - especially by children.

Such programs are capable of significantly enhancing human development, for example, by training the mind, encouraging logical thinking and creativity, and broadening language capabilities.

Unfortunately, there has recently been a strong tendency toward programs that demean human beings. Brutal war games, pornographic and sexist games, and games based on political extremism and themes of racial, ethnic and religious hatred are becoming more and more popular.

It is alarming to note a trend developing among those who produce, distribute, and play such games signifying lack of responsibility and human respect.

The International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP), a union of computer societies from around the world, hereby points out the inherent dangers in the playing of these games and actively condemns their production, distribution, and use. There are many computer games that are not only entertaining, but wholesome and educational. IFIP appeals to everybody, throughout the world - in particular in its member societies - to censure harmful games, to raise awareness of the issues involved, and to support only computer games that involve the respect of human dignity.' It is believed that the statement is directed at the proliferation of (illegal) racist and anti-semitic games in German speaking countries.

Diplomatic GENie

The on-line gaming network GENie is working with boardgame publisher Avalon Hill to produce an online version of AH's classic game, **Diplomacy**. The design will involve a mainframe moderated system with a graphical front end and a mouse interface.

Avalon Hill's English Civil War Game **Kingmaker**, is also being converted to computer but this time by a UK publisher. SSI will probably release the game in the US, though this is unconfirmed at the time of going to press.

patch will update the appropriate files to address a number of hardware compatibility issues. The old files will be preserved. Notable fixes: support for Gravis Ultra Sound emulation, AMI BIOS hangs, and IRQ 7 problems. A separate text file is available offering precise details of this patch.

Sir Tech

Crusaders of the Dark Savant Patch #2 for the Don Barlone bug. This patch alleviates a situation whereby Don Barlone is awaiting a scouting report that never comes because another party has sent his scouts to the merry cheese factory (ie dead) and refuses to deal with the party. ('Maybe later', he says.) He might also be hoarding maps, in which case this upload will help him to decide to deal with the party anyway.

Patch 1A

Patch corrects 'hogs afloat' problem, ie 5-10 freeze, then game OK, 60 steps later, freeze, then OK, etc. (Also occurs when resting.) Symptoms occur when party has a lot of maps and heads out to sea, thus making it impossible for the NPC's to reach. (May also occur in Lost Temple of Munkharama.) This is correct patch. Do *not* use cdsp1.exe. File is self-extracting. Copy to directory then type: CDSX1 <CR>. (May specify -o option to overwrite.)

Footnote

Unless otherwise started, all of these upgrades are available free to registered users. They may also be downloaded from major on-line networks such as GENie and CompuServe.

One small step for Ad Lib one giant leap for PC sound

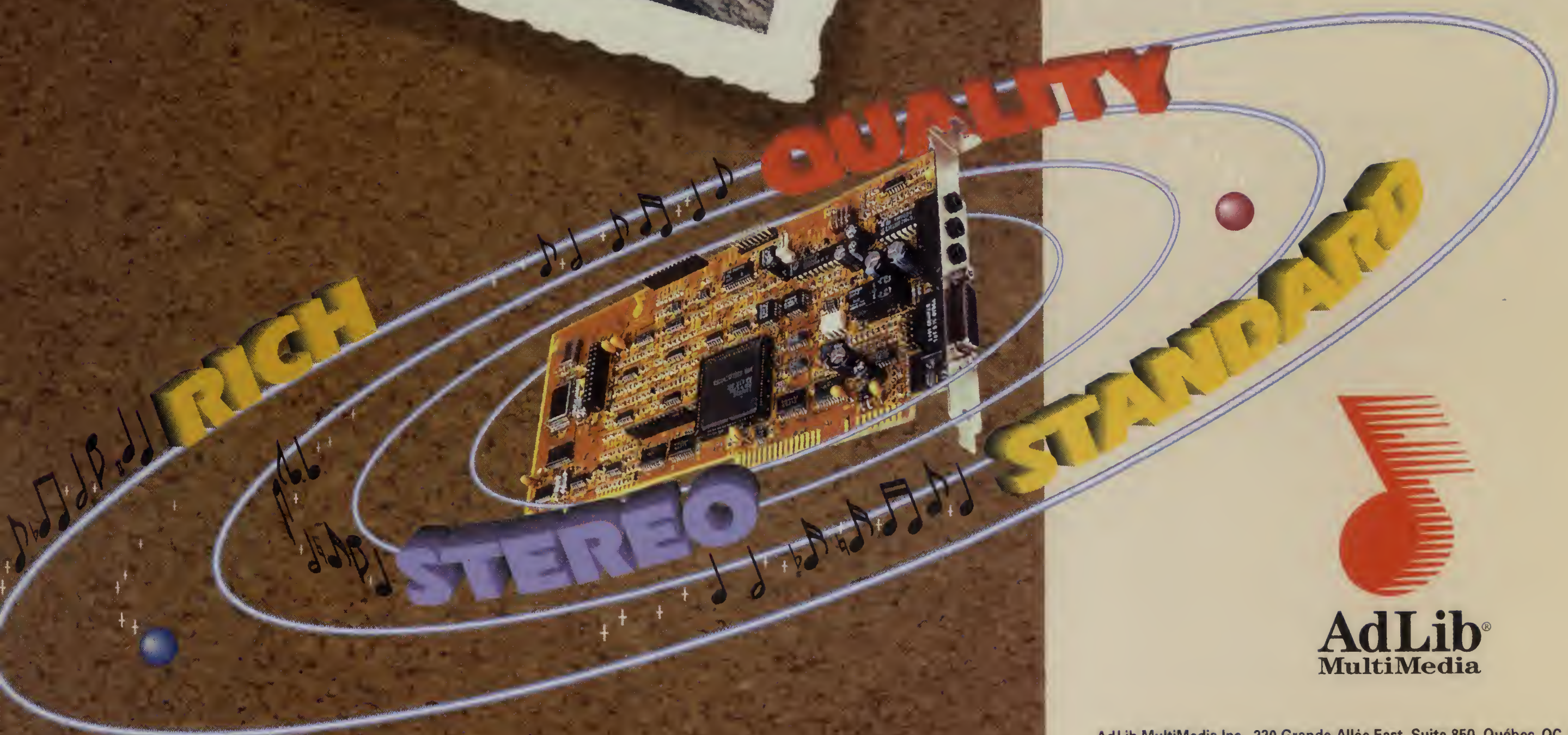
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Baby it's Dark Outside



The Magic Candle III

Gary Oldman eat your heart out, for here comes your on-screen personage in 'Real Time Visual Technology'. Transylvania, it would appear, is going techno and its legendary Count is going to get yet another facelift. But enough of these mindless puns and on with the game. **Veil of Darkness**, appears under the auspices of SSI, via Event Horizon. This is the same combination that put together **The Summoning**, the acclaimed RPG which had such an utterly wonderful magic system.

The story is set in Romania Transylvania Alps in the late 1930s. The player takes on the role of a cargo pilot who has had the misfortune to crash-land in this inhospitable locale. Barely has he had time to cross his heart and munch some garlic than he is faced with a vicious vamp known as Kairn. Kairn's favorite bedtime snack happens to be the local villagers who, true to legend, reappear in a state of extreme undeadness. The player's task is to try and put a stop to all this bloodletting and ensure that the sanctity of the graveyard is restored. Failure to do so will result in being just another stiff on the slab.

The aforementioned gore is displayed in 256 colors (255 of them red), while the overheard viewpoint is enhanced by pop-up 'cinematic sequences' that advance the story as well as looking rather nice. The interface is much the same as that in **The Summoning**; friendly point-and-click to enable friendly interaction with the game's characters unfriendly characters.



Veil of Darkness

The gameplay involves puzzle solving, combat with strange beasts, the negotiation of complex mazes, and constant visits to the blood donor clinic. To assist in all this, an auto-mapping facility and a print-out feature is included. Dracula is never actually mentioned by name possibly because of licensing rights. Cue Bram Stoker jokes; turn, grave, etc.

Veil of Darkness is scheduled for March release by SSI

A dark blight is spreading! Who can light the magic candle that will dispel this terror? (One million hippies immediately raise their hands). Back then, to the world of Deruvia and Gurex, land of **The Magic Candle III** where crops are failing, illness is spreading, and strange beasts lurk in the forests and hills.

The story is a vaguely familiar one but lots of things in **MCIII** are brand spanking new. The mouse interface is greatly enhanced (ie there is one now) and the automatic notepad feature has been completely rewritten based on user suggestions. When going through narrow passages it is no longer necessary to instruct dietary challenged members of the party to drop out of formation; they now do so automatically thus enabling them to squeeze through. The effects of illness and poison have been beefed up (so to speak) - a poisoned character no longer gains benefits from herbs and mushrooms.

The training sessions have been improved, allowing more flexibility in timing during combat. Assigned characters no longer face imprisonment while innocently wandering around the countryside. The stealth characteristic is instead used to determine the chance of avoiding an adjacent beastie patrol.

Other exciting features include: visiting a library (read a book!); exploring a blighted forest; looking for a wizard in Ukrbal. Fight the blight in **Magic Candle III**! □

Magic Candle III is scheduled for a January release by Mindcraft

Brian Walker sheds some light on two new releases

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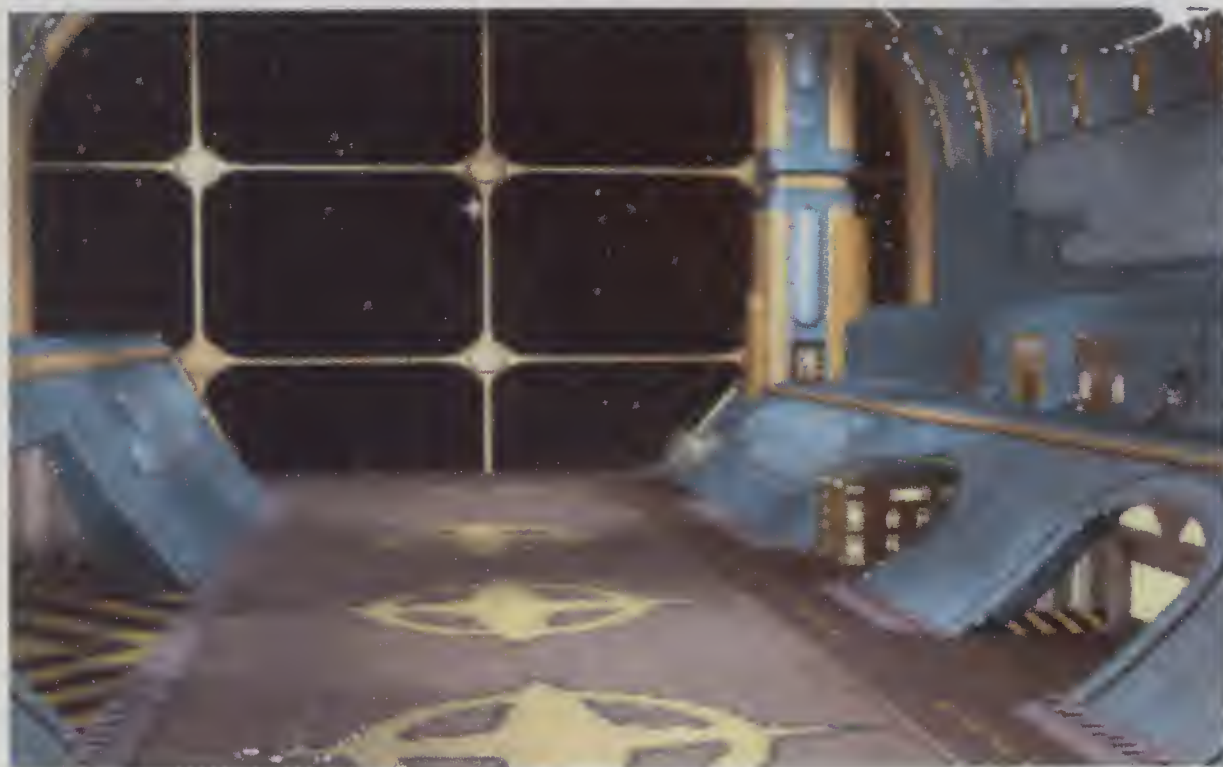
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Reader Service No. 107

The Origins of Privateer



Anthony
Nichols of
Origin
Systems
goes public

Out in the far reaches of space, late in the 27th century, a fighter pilot jolts awake. The proximity alert flashes its warning on his console. There are six red blips on the radar screen, hostile enemy ahead. He has no choice but to fight. He puts the afterburners into range and lets go a volley from his mass drivers, destroying one enemy and wounding another. Someone gets a missile lock on him. He takes a hit. Aft shields are down forty percent. It's time to get busy. Rolling hard to the right puts him in position to fire off his last missile at point blank range. Bits of the destroyed Kamekh hurtle by as the fighter pilot frantically maneuvers to protect his vulnerable aft side. Victory seems distant as the remaining enemy taunt our hero, insulting his family. It will be a battle hard won, but won nonetheless. Anyone thinking this sounds like **Wing Commander**, would only be half right.

Market forces

This is **Privateer**, the next space-combat simulator from Origin ... sort of. See, it's not just a space-combat, action-adventure piece. It's also a resource-manipulation, decide-your-own-destiny game. The primary difference is in what happens before and after the exchanges of photon fire. In **Wing Commander**, Joe Bob Hero would have been waiting in military barracks for the call to arms, a crack soldier in a long and arduous war. After his return from combat he may receive commendations and meet a few of the other pilots, while in the background Tactical and High Command make all the decisions of whom and where to fight. **Wing Commander** integrated the adventure of space combat with developing and evolving characters to motivate the storyline.

Privateer adds greater interactivity to the mix. In **Privateer**, our Joe Bob has a drink in the local pub to celebrate the financed purchase of his new fighter, unsuccessfully trying not to think about the payments. He sits across from a woman who means business. She offers him a job. It's probably illegal but it will help make a payment. He knows that her offer pays better than anything either of the Guilds are offering. It's a deal, and our Mr. Hero may take the precaution of buying extra shields for the fighter, putting it on

his account, adding to the payments. If he's wise, he might even try to do a little freelance trading. Common sense and the rest of his cash can probably get him a profitable cargo. All he has to do now is survive.

The profit motive

The challenge in designing **Privateer** was to allow players to make all the decisions that affect them within the **Wing Commander** universe. Since the lone maverick, crack pilot is at the heart of any 'Commander' game, this would have to be central in the design's development. **Privateer** grew out of the long discussed 'Trade Commander' and retains an emphasis on profit. However, when the project was given to Joel Manners to design, he expanded the concept to one of total freedom. As he saw it, the player should choose whether to fly a fighter and have a more mercenary career, escorting ships and eliminating the boss's enemies, or take a more mercantile approach, flying the 27th century's equivalent to the 18-wheeler, defending cargo and playing the commodities market. Still, it's important to remember that **Privateer** is a combat simulator. It's about being the best pilot and the straightest shot. It's about the lawlessness of the frontier.

Gun law

We realized that we would have to do away with the structured plot of all previous Commander games. Freedom means being able to accept a mission and halfway through, throw it away and suffer the consequences. It means being able to fly wherever and allying yourself with whomever. The best way to do this was to create a location with the diversity, size and available challenges to exploit the player's freedom. Thus was born Gemini Sector. Gemini is a frontier province rich in natural resources. Primarily, though, Gemini is an important front in the ongoing Terran-Kilrathi war.

Encounters with the warriors of Kilrah and the Confederation Naval forces firmly ground **Privateer** in the **Wing**

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Reader Service No. 10

Commander universe. Despite the many pockets of civilization, Gemini is an untamed and barely explored territory ruled by the gun and those who have them. If players decide to buy and sell commodities on their own, it wouldn't hurt to use common sense. That is, don't try to sell ore to a mining base or grain to an agricultural planet; no one needs what they've got too much of.

The interface will be familiar to players of any **Commander** game, but there are enhancements. Let's take the capital of Gemini, New Constantinople, for example. The player has just arrived in-system and trundled across the space ways. N.C. appeared, hanging in the void, ominous behind the flurry of ships buzzing about its docking bays. Approval to land crackles over the ship's speaker and the automatic docking range comes into view. After the smooth, automated landing, it's time to do some business. The ship sits, dwarfed by a hangar large enough to dogfight in, waiting to be refuelled. The player is back in the intuitive world of point and click interactivity, only better. After making arrangements to have the ship refuelled, one moves on to the main concourse. This is a kind of town square with access to any place the player may want to go to.

Base thoughts

Once on a base, like New Constantinople, talk to people and explore. Interactivity is an important part of **Privateer**. There are people to talk to in every bar. There are the fixers who know that the best place to find the pilot they need is over two fingers of whisky. Then there are the regulars who've heard it all and seen it all and will be happy to reveal the details.

As intriguing and important as the characters and bases may be, it's time to get back into the void and do some damage, if only because the bill collectors have bigger guns. Players are masters of their own destiny and space is not without difficult decisions. Whether to shoot first and talk later, which 'nav points' to use, and whether it's worth the added maneuverability to jettison cargo are among the easiest choices to be made. The hardest are which missions are worth their hazards and which planets, colonies are most likely to buy cargo, contraband or otherwise.

The technology of space flight, while largely transparent to the player, is vastly improved since the days of **Wing Commander II**. Besides the smarter damage system developed for the **Strike Commander**, there will be a greater diversity among ships encountered, requiring a more complex AI structure and many new ships and weapons.

Merchants of Venus

One of the most important new features is that there is no need to stop playing. Merchants, mercenaries and the militia will always be hiring. Refineries will always need ore and pirates will always buy weapons. Opportunities will never dry up.

Because the needs and wants and homes of the population of Gemini Sector are fleshed out, they will continue doing business. This is a large and well-populated sector. The war will continue, commerce will continue, and if good credit is maintained, dealers will continue to supply accessories or even a new ship.



There is never a point in **Privateer** where a menu screen pops up to say that the game has been won and that players should go back to a saved game if they want to keep playing. This is a land of opportunity and adventure and one that traverses the polluted drizzle of New Detroit as well as the pastoral colleges of planet Oxford. All in all, quite enough to make one forget that it's 4am on a Wednesday morning. □

Privateer is scheduled for March release by Origin Systems.



"First, you must return the royal scepter to Urkabel."

(Actual screens may vary.)
Reader Service No. 10

LUCASARTS STRIKES BACK

X-Wing: Brian Walker feels the force

The first question that springs to mind upon hearing that Lucasarts **X-Wing** is to be based upon Lucasfilms *Star Wars* trilogy is: what kept you? After all, it's been fourteen years since Darth and the gang first appeared upon the screen. But think about it: if a game based upon the film had been released anywhere around that period, Luke Skywalker and Co. would be thrusting into hyperspace in Apple II graphics.

When it was decided that computer technology was sufficiently advanced to do the series justice, Larry Holland was slated to deliver the finished goods. Unfortunately, however, Holland's **Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe** (SWOTL) went way over over schedule, postponing the arrival of the *Star Wars* project even further. In the light of the SWOTL experience, it would be a brave man who would announce a release date for **X-Wing**. In fact, the game is already late as it was scheduled for a September release. Let's just say it's close, and may even be out by the time this article appears.

The opening sequence of **X-Wing** introduces players to the ongoing struggle between the Rebel Alliance and the Empire. The player takes the role of a newly recruited pilot for the Alliance. New pilots learn the basic flying and firing skills of one of the three major Rebel starfighters in the pilot's proving ground. Essentially this is a training scenario where rookies learn to negotiate obstacle courses and practice shooting.

Once basic flying and combat skills have been mastered, pilots enter the Combat School where they may fly recreated historical encounters against the Imperial forces.

Moving on to the Combat Review Film Room, pilots can review their own or other pilot's missions and if they so desire, jump into the action as a mission is being replayed.

The 'real' missions come in the form 'tours.' In the tours, players take part in Rebel combat missions operations against the Empire. Each tour consists of between 12 and 15 missions. The tours can be played independently, but the intention is that players should play them chronologically to depict the struggle between Rebellion and Empire so that they form part of larger strategic plan rather than being autonomous.

X-Wing, however, is no mere 'shooter,' for in addition to a brand new flight engine which integrates polygon and bitmap technologies, **X-Wing** employs a new proprietary story engine called Landru, which was developed by co-designer, Edward Kilham. 'Though first and foremost a combat simulator, we wanted to turn up the intensity of the simulation by placing it in a dynamic and believable universe,' said Kilham. Adding to the intensity will be the sound which features dialog from the *Star Wars* movie and the digitized heavy breathing of Darth Vader. Also featured for the first time is Lucasarts proprietary *IMUSE* sound system which can compose music on the fly based upon player choices. The effect of this to produce music for 100% of the game, and to



provide seamless transitions between dramatic sequences.

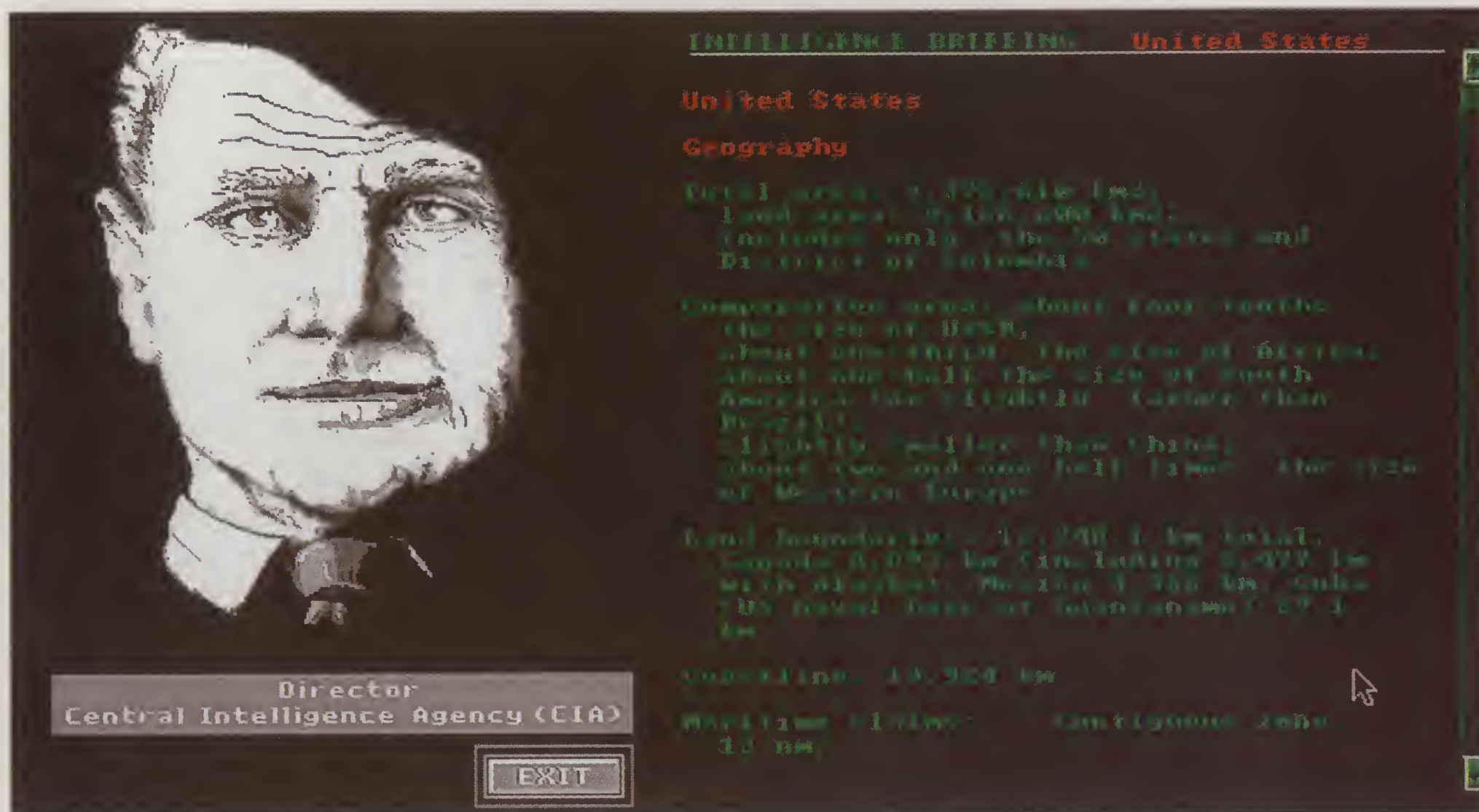
Most of the familiar names from *Star Wars* will be present in the game, plus there will be a cast of new characters. The main story involves the latter, but Luke Skywalker *et al* will appear at regular intervals. Add-on disks will feature at least two new Space Combat Tours featuring the rebellion. In addition, Lucasarts is already planning a sequel to **X-Wing** which will allow players to fly for the rebellion. A CD ROM version is also being talked about, but at this stage it is not known how it will differ from the floppy disk version. □

X-Wing is definitely scheduled for release by Lucasarts

Shadow President

Old world order

By Steven Wartofsky



their specialty, and will respond to the player's actions. For example, my Press Secretary resigned in one round after I nuked Somalia to just get it all over with. With the assistance of these advisors, the player has a number of agendas which can become the focus of play. Hunger, Economic and Disaster Relief can do much to increase the President's global and domestic reputation; efforts can be made to intervene around the world and take action to reduce the likelihood of military conflict; governments can be surreptitiously overthrown; and if all that seems too tame, the might of the U.S. military can be brought to bear to create havoc and submission (dream on) around the world.

Nap hand

What this all means is that the player can play Mahatma Ghandi or Napoleon VI, depending on mood. Experiments can be created to see whether more aggressive or more ameliorative strategies are likely to prove both internally and internationally more effective.

The player may adopt a *laissez faire* attitude in all areas but one, and then concentrate on developing knowledge and skills in that area. (The influence of foreign aid on political policy and attitude is one of the more visible strengths of the design, something not usually seen in this kind of simulation). Finally, it's possible to test out whether simply going along with advisory input or formulating comprehensive policy with longer-term goals is more likely to be successful in the areas mentioned above. The advisors' advice is often conservative, and may often prove contradictory.

The interface lets the player select which country is going to be given Mr President's attention. Simply by dragging the mouse to various areas of the global map, crosshairs are made to move to specific countries, which highlight in red. The player can zoom down or up from global to regional to country displays, each providing a different kind of overview of the situation. Depending on how small it is, a country can then be selected from any level in which it's visible, moving the player to the next aspect of the interface.

Here, the player may make choices in terms of humanitarian, economic, military, nuclear and intelligence aid, and can also initiate diplomatic, economic, covert, military or nuclear actions. The choice is to use dollars or other means to effect policy, and which to choose is entirely contingent upon the situation with each

There has been nothing until now even attempting to scale the heights of global political, military, economic and diplomatic simulation reached years ago with Chris Crawford's **Balance of Power**. **Shadow President** comes as welcome news, then, just for that reason. It's an effort to integrate a thorough simulation of US global strategy, domestic politics, domestic and international economics, and global diplomacy, all based around real-world data gathered from the 1990 *CIA World Factbook*, available online for reference while playing the game.

Text appeal

The designers have obviously given lots of attention to providing detailed data for all aspects of the simulation. The problem is, the style in which that data is represented seems at some levels a bit old-fashioned, particularly in comparison with other recent information-intensive designs, such as **Sim Life**. There are lots

of numbers thrown at the player; much of the information which comes across appears simply as extended text reports, realistic enough in its way but lagging in the flash factor count.

The main goal of the simulation is to excel in the role of the President of the USA, circa 1990. Impeachment, assassination, even a coup are all possible during the President's reign. Most importantly, policy must be implemented with an eye on the upcoming election (let's hope George Bush doesn't get a hand on this and start replaying the past two years to see where things went wrong).

The President is not alone in the effort to maintain his power and effectiveness; there is a cabinet of seven advisors (again, much like **Balance of Power**), each of whom has a special area of expertise. There's a National Security Advisor, a Secretary of State, a Secretary of Defense, a Press Secretary (the only woman on staff - this is obviously a Republican-era design), a Director of the CIA and, finally, an Economic Advisor. Each of these advisors will provide useful info in

Designed by

Brad Stock, Robin Antonick, Charlie Athanas

Published by

D C True, Ltd.

Systems

PC

Graphics

256 color VGA

Sound

Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, AdLib

Supports

Mouse

country. Weaker countries, depending on their existent political alignments, can be bolstered against aggressive neighbors.

Each of the above-mentioned actions provides at least five different options, giving the player plenty of decision-making opportunities each step along the way.

Year planner

Shadow President runs in real-time, which means that time is passing during the decision-making, the region-selecting, and the information-gathering portions of the game. The design seems to opt for providing real-time as a way of making the simulation a little more realistic.

Time will pass at a compressed rate, from one hour per second all the way up to one day per second, depending on player choice. Time can be stopped as well, to pause and look around, if that's the preferred way to play.

If there's anything to criticize in **Shadow President**, it's that, like some SSI wargame designs, there's a lot to absorb and it's mostly numbers and text. Rushing through all this is impossible,



and the whole exercise feels rather more daunting than it need be; the computer could be used, in this day of high-quality graphics and sound design, to simplify the organization of information, but as the simulation stands, it simply throws masses

of data at players and leaves it up to them to make sense of it all.

Nevertheless, **Shadow President** is a truly extensive simulation that will appeal to anyone with the vaguest interest in the subject matter. □

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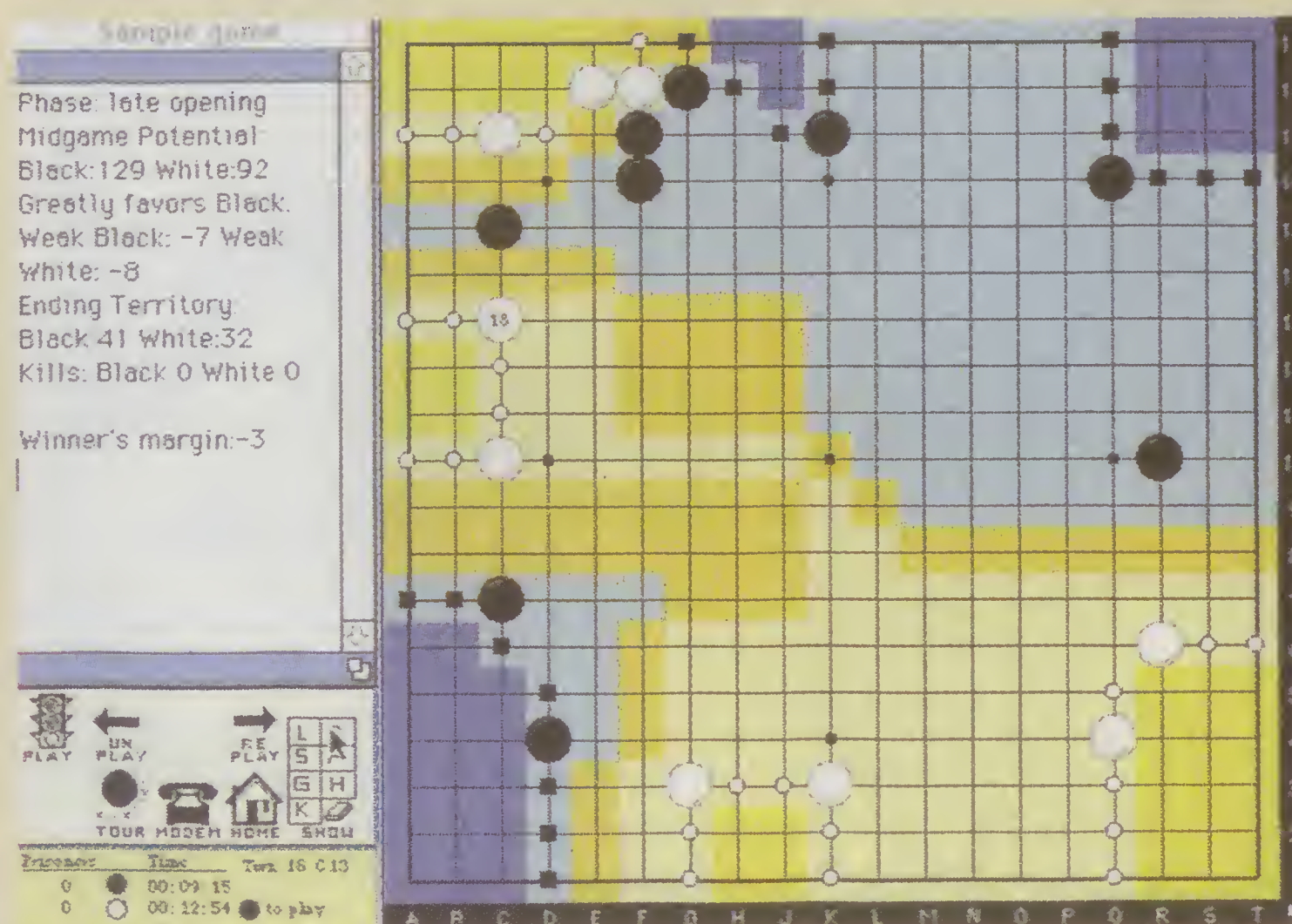
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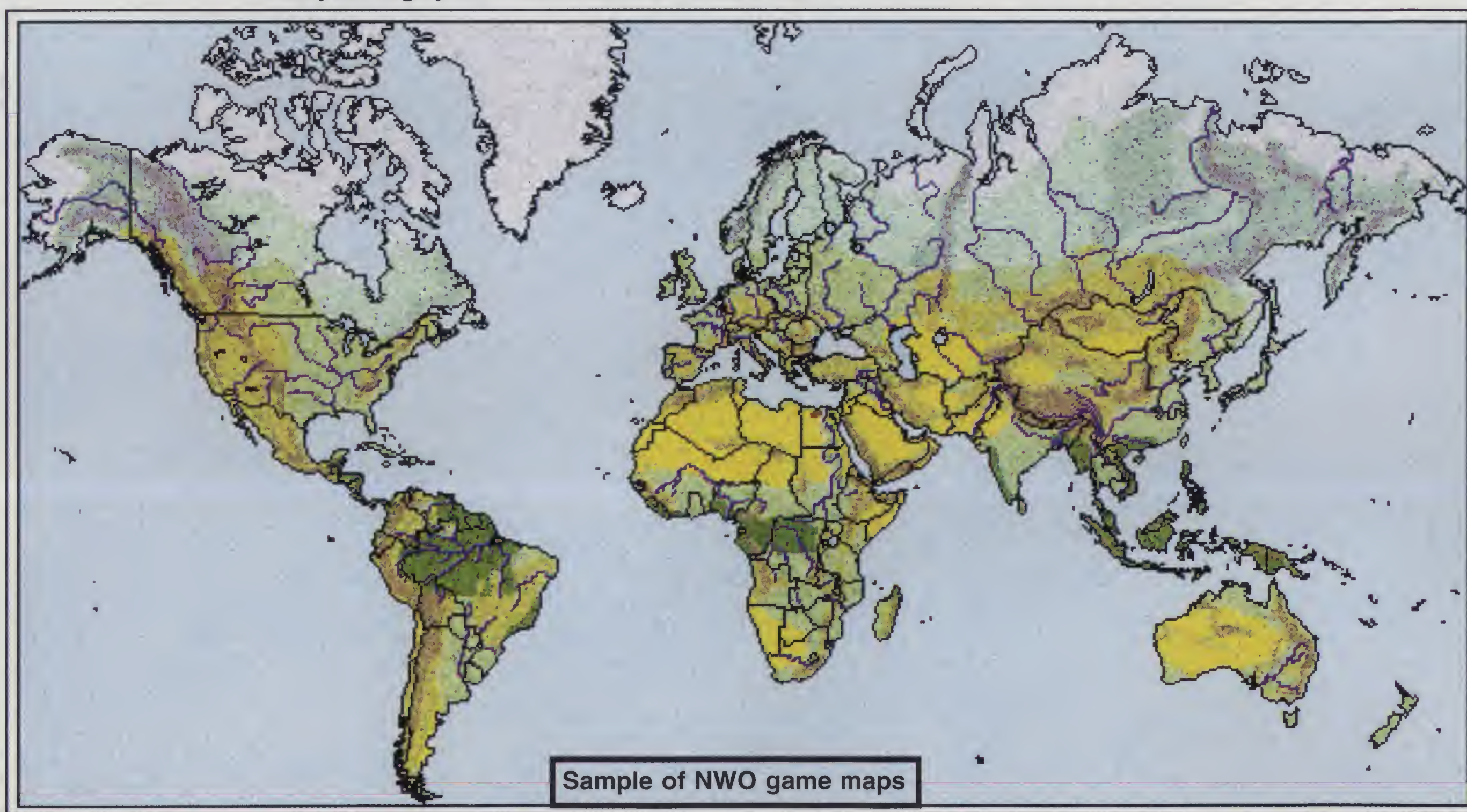
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Campaign offers a real-time simulation of Second World War combat at various levels of detail, from two or three groups in a tactical battle up to the all encompassing D-Day. Strategic and tactical considerations are catered for, the latter with an arcade-style combat system. A pile of extras (maps, posters and other WWII memorabilia) are included as well as two excellent manuals.

Forming a group

A number of scenarios are supplied, graded simple, average and complex. Traditional military structures are abandoned in favor of the 'group'. Simple battles give the player up to three 'battle-groups' (the basic unit in the game) with which to achieve a specific objective, while at the other end of the spectrum, complex scenarios can involve upwards of 30 groups plus airfields and production centres. The literature supplied indicates that further sets of scenarios may be released later to cover other 20th century wars.

The strategic screen is divided into two: the map and a set of iconic controls. The map can represent a vast area; fortunately a simple zoom facility is provided. Friendly battle groups are shown as coloured circles with a line attached to indicate their ordered destination, if any. The group's description is displayed next to the circle, which can present problems with identification when two or more groups are adjacent, necessitating use of the highest zoom mode. For those of a mind to tinker, a fully-featured scenario editor is provided.

As is usual with computer wargames, enemy units are only shown on the map when visible to one or more friendly units. Movement is accomplished by pointing and clicking. When an enemy unit is sighted within artillery range, the player is given the option to open fire. Once two opposing units are close enough to engage, the relative strengths are displayed and the decision must be taken to engage or run away. Battles may be resolved automatically (and almost instantaneously) or the player can take control.

Any vehicle in the battle group may be selected to be put under player control. Different vehicles may be selected as the battle progresses or simply as the vehicle is incapacitated or runs out of ammo. Control is by keyboard and is somewhat reminiscent of the old arcade games which provided two joysticks, one for each track on the tank. The map of the immediate

Campaign

Group therapy

By Mike Woodhouse



location is only a mouse-click away, which is just as well, because particularly in the early stages of play, the tank is seldom where the player thinks it is, much less headed in the right direction. If real tank warfare was that confusing (and I suspect that to a large degree it was), my respect for those guys has gone up considerably.

Mosquito bites

Airfields, when available, allow air strikes to be called down on enemy positions. A number of aircraft are available, although I was a little surprised to see that although four varieties of Mosquito are provided, there is no place for the Hurricane, a more widely-used British fighter than even the Spitfire. Production centres are added to the more complex scenarios and produce convoys of reinforcements and supplies which become available as time passes. Convoys are directed by giving the factory a destination in the same way that mobile units are ordered.

It should be borne in mind that **Campaign** is primarily a simulation of armoured warfare: although there are nearly 200 units described in the equipment manual

(and impressively rendered in the program), infantry plays no part in the battles presented.

Facing up

All in all, this is a bit of a curate's egg. While the whole package looks very slick and the design indicates considerable effort expended, I'm just not sure that it's hit the mark. The best computer wargames to date have followed, and usually refined, (with varying degrees of success) the concepts developed over decades of face-to-face play. The strategic play in **Campaign** lacks real detail, while the tactical combat is played out in arcade style.

Campaign's box blurb proclaims itself to be 'Simply the most original war game ever!' It certainly is original, but in this market that may not always be a good thing. In even bigger type it declaims 'The Most Comprehensive Military Simulation of Warfare in World War II.' Read one way it may very well be true, but I'd recommend a healthy dose of salt be taken before swallowing this claim. **Campaign** is not a bad game, but it may be *too* original for committed wargamers. □

Published by

Empire Software (UK)
Readysoft (USA)

Designed by

Jonathan Griffiths

Systems

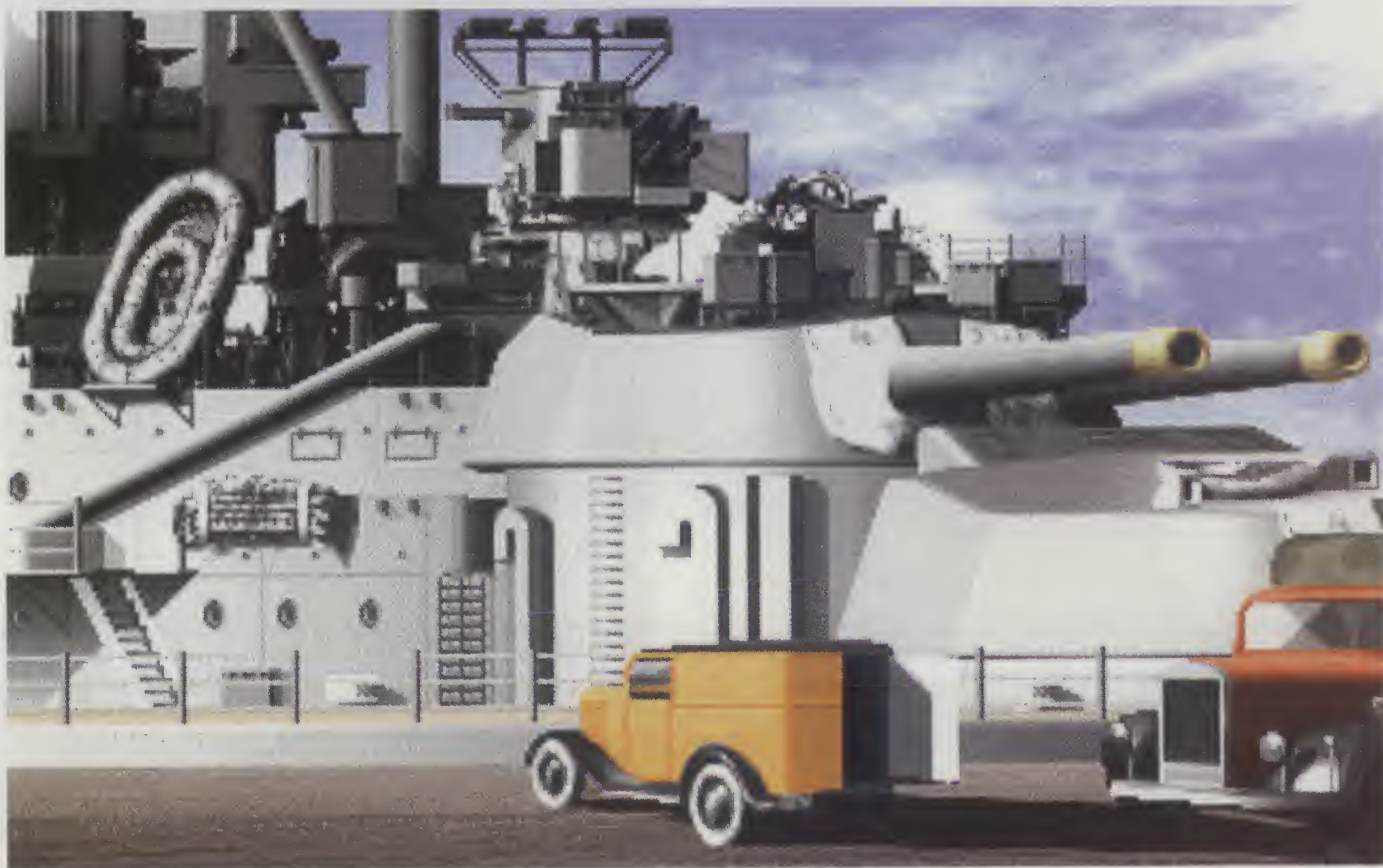
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ALL AT SEA?

John Van Valer provides a guide for mariners lost in SSI's Great Naval Battles



Naval miniatures gamers will approach it with an experience and a familiar eye. Simulator fans will have other ideas on what needs to be done. Wargamers will bring their cool minds and detailed plans. Other gamers will be wooed by its sleek look and promise. In the end, however, SSI's **Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic 1939-43 (GNB)** will leave almost every gamer with a few questions about what just happened in their game and how to best approach the situations presented. Unfortunately, these questions will inevitably point toward game design philosophy, documentation, and outright bugs. A grasp of some of these issues will help players who want to get the most out of this interesting game.

Documentation

The first thing **GNB** players should do is read the manual, supplemental documentation and the readme file. Due to the numerous stations and controls in the game, it is much easier to handle one's forces if it is understood that, for the most part, the interface provides several different ways to accomplish a given task; typically, a menu command, a mouse shortcut (click on objects, or a combination key press and mouse click), and a keyboard command. Effective command, especially of

multi-ship task forces, requires the ability to be able to move around quickly. When all else fails, use the pause key.

The Ship Data charts at the beginning of the manual describe the critical differences between the ships used in the game. The Penetration Chart (p. 75) would seem to be key to effective battle management. After all, it appears that the Bismarck, for example, should be able to hit and penetrate almost every British warship at a range of 30,000 yards, while the same British warships cannot penetrate it at that range.

Tactical

A quick scenario will show that this is not the case, however. Despite extensive historical documentation, **GNBNA** offers virtually no further explanation of this critical game element. It turns out that the ship statistics in the manual only list the maximum armor thickness of a given area while there may be numerous other areas on the ship that are extremely vulnerable (the Hood, for example), yet they are not documented. Therefore, the Penetration Chart and even the Ship Data charts themselves should only be considered a very rough guideline and, sadly, probably of little use to most players. The only alternative is to find this hard data at your local naval library and, even then, it is not

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clear to what extent the designer's have included such information into the simulation.

In tactical engagements, use of destroyers can often be the decisive factor. The computer AI places a very high priority on targeting destroyers and will often continuously shell a destroyer rather than engage capital ships. This allows human players to simply target computer BBs and heavy cruisers while sending in destroyers and light cruisers to draw off all the heavy enemy fire. Eventually destroyers will be sunk or crippled and the computer will finally engage capital ships - if they are still capable of doing so and numerous rounds of 'free' fire from friendly ships!

Clearly, destroyers and their load of powerful torpedoes are a major threat at close range, but they should not draw all of a BB's fire when at medium to long range, especially when chasing a fleeing BB and torpedoes are not realistic option because of range and relative speeds. Destroyers are also exceedingly difficult to hit, often only a 5-15% probability regardless of the range, compounding their disruptive effect on enemy capital ships because of the extra time and ammunition that must be expended to sink them.

Damage model

The final, and often most decisive, effect of destroyers relates to how the damage model in **GNBNA** works - or fails to. For all ships, damage is allocated by compartment. A hit will damage, destroy, flood, or set fire to at least one and possibly more compartments on one or more deck levels of the ship.

On all ships, though most noticeable and unrealistic on the smaller ones, once a compartment is destroyed it can still receive and absorb hits, saving other areas of the ship from damage. Furthermore, the number of compartments damaged in a hit does not appear to accurately reflect the ship's size and armor versus the shell size and range.

For example, a 15" shell from the Bismarck should at least do major damage to a lowly destroyer. In **GNBNA**, such a hit would likely destroy three of four compartments of superstructure leave the destroyer in fighting shape. If those compartments of the destroyer were previously destroyed, the hit has no effect at all!

To compound this problem, a last minute design decision made at SSI to not reduce the number of damage control parties as a result of ship damage (reflecting crew deaths/injuries and, presumably, morale) so that a given ship will always have all its damage parties available until it goes down. This results in miraculous repairs (a heavy cruiser recovering from a 40 degree starboard list in ten minutes of game time continues the fight during this period and while under fire!) and coupled with the 'hits to destroyed compartments' feature, allows ships to absorb a tremendous number of hits.

It is not uncommon for a single destroyer take over a dozen hits from 14" + guns and several dozen from secondary guns before sinking. The Bismarck could easily take over a hundred penetrating hits and use up the entire ammo supply of heavy British task force before it sinks! Its not hard to see why destroyers are so effective against enemy capital ships - they're very difficult to hit, pose a significant threat if they can launch an effective short-range torpedo attack, can absorb dozens of

repairable hits, and are worth relatively few victory points. With an effective destroyer screen, one or two battleships should be able to sink several enemy battleships with almost no damage to themselves.

There are a number of other useful tactics. Keep an eye on the range circles for all guns. The Bismarck's secondary guns, for example, have far superior range to most British secondaries so closing the firing range to bring more guns to bear is always effective. In addition, one may find that some guns lose their targets or stop firing for unknown reasons, especially secondary guns. Simply switch to manual control for that station and click on the individual turrets to see if manual retargeting helps. Keep an eye on ammunition supplies as they have a way a disappearing quickly. Don't overlook the value of torpedoes either. Use destroyers and light cruisers to make torpedo runs at enemy ships. If nothing else, these attacks will disrupt enemy fire as they maneuver to avoid the attack and may even result in a hit. Against slow moving convoys, a good torpedo attack can sink two or three merchantmen.

Observation aircraft

Observation aircraft should also be very useful, but a bug in version 1.0 renders them useless as they do not affect hit probability when shadowing an enemy ship. In tactical engagements, aircraft from carriers can and should be used. Depending on the initial engagement range and force composition, waiting for the carriers to launch an airstrike before aggressively engaging the enemy can be useful.

For both observation and carrier aircraft, planes not landing before the engagement is over are lost. Since an engagement is automatically terminated when the last enemy ship is sunk, care should be taken to land all aircraft before finishing off the last enemy - or one's planes may go with him!

In convoy attacks, some escorts may not appear, since only seven to ten ships out of the entire convoy can be engaged, and others may be at the very limits of the engagement range - effectively out the battle before it starts and prone to cruising beyond range and thereby disengaging.

Attacking destroyers should attempt to clear out any escorting destroyers and engage the merchantmen with guns and torpedoes. Attacking BBs and CAs should scout for escorting BBs, CAs and CLs and can attempt draw them away from the convoy merely by their presence. This will allows the attacking destroyers to wreak enormous havoc with the convoy and effectively split the engagement into a destroyer vs destroyer/merchantmen and a BB/CA vs. BB/CA/CL battle. In any event, the defender is often at a major disadvantage in convoy attacks because of the seven to ten ship limit, most of which will be merchantmen, and, at best, only have one or two capital ships with which to defend.

Strategic level

At the strategic level, the campaign games pose interesting scenarios, but the computer AI is very poor at coordinating its naval resources and can be easily defeated. Nevertheless, the historical Allied and German strategies work well and should be followed.

The British should use their superior numbers to wear down the Germans, keep them away from convoys, and accept equal exchanges in ship losses. Damaged German ships will have to cruise near British waters on their way back to port and can be sunk then if not earlier. The Germans can usually avoid the GIUK gap cruiser screen, or just use superior speed or bad weather to break a shadow, and sail into the convoy lanes for good hunting.

British air power should be avoided at all costs and a careful eye on British task force sightings will generally give the German player a good idea of where the major enemy forces are stationed. With far fewer ships and a long routes of attack, the German player cannot trade losses with the British.

The greatest challenge for the German player may well be limiting his diet of convoys in order to insure that his ship have ammo in case of interception on their return voyages. This will involve

running in and out of Brest for rearming and refueling and occasional returns to the Reich for repairs and to regain effectiveness.

To re-arm, a task force should disband when it reaches port and wait until after midnight when the ship will be magically refueled and rearmed. When ships' effectiveness ratings get below 60%, they should head back to port for shore leave to avoid breakdowns before engagements. Don't help the British out by going into battle with disabled systems! This can be tedious, but it will save ships in the long-run and reduce the chances of 'bad-luck' engagements.

Land-based air power should be used to attack any ships foolish enough to fly within range. Ships in port are subject to automatic airstrike and Brest is not a good place for German ships to stay for more than a few days.

Carriers

Carriers are most effective with hit and run airstrikes and as part of a shadowing force. In a shadow group, the intrinsic air search range of the carrier makes it very difficult for shadowed ships to break away. During the day, the carrier can launch airstrikes and gradually wear down the shadowed ships until a stronger task force is ready to intercept and engage. Though carriers are slower than some of the German ships, the computer AI will not run its forces at full speed in attempts to break shadows by slower ships.

Task forces should be composed of ships capable of fulfilling a specific mission. For the British, mixing slow ships with fast ones will make it very difficult to catch the speedy Germans. An interception task force should consist of at least two BBs, two or three CAs/CLs, and a three to five ship destroyer screen. A force such as this should be able to inflict at least moderate damage on most German raiding groups and make them an easy kill for a followup interception task

force. Shadow forces only need two fast cruisers and possibly a CV.

German task forces need only consist of a BB and a CA, two BBs, or two or three of the pocket battleships. The principle German concern is convoy attacks and these small task forces are very capable of destroying several convoys before returning to base for resupply. Any more ships is simply overkill. Because ships' effectiveness ratings drop with each engagement and over time, it is better to stagger sorties several of these smaller raiding task forces so that there are always German forces hunting for convoys while one or two task forces are heading to or returning from port.

The limited range of the German CLs and DDs will keep them out of the Atlantic for the most part and in reserve for supporting capital ship raids on Murmansk convoys. In any convoy interception, the German player should not be surprised to find one of the older British battleships on escort duty. Such an escort should still be easily overcome by the smaller, higher quality, German task force.

1.1?

GNBNA has numerous bugs and design problems that dramatically alter otherwise sound strategy. SSI has promised that there will be a version 1.1 that fixes some of the bugs. The GNBNA system is quite nice and it would be ashamed to let it go unfixed. It remains to be seen what can be done with some of the design problems. The upcoming Scenario Editor should allow players to construct more balanced engagements, perhaps with no destroyers, and better experiment with the capabilities of the various ship classes. The other expansion disks may also help to provide better balance, especially if they can be integrated into the campaign games. Hopefully these enhancements will make GNBNA more enjoyable and challenging to all gamers. □



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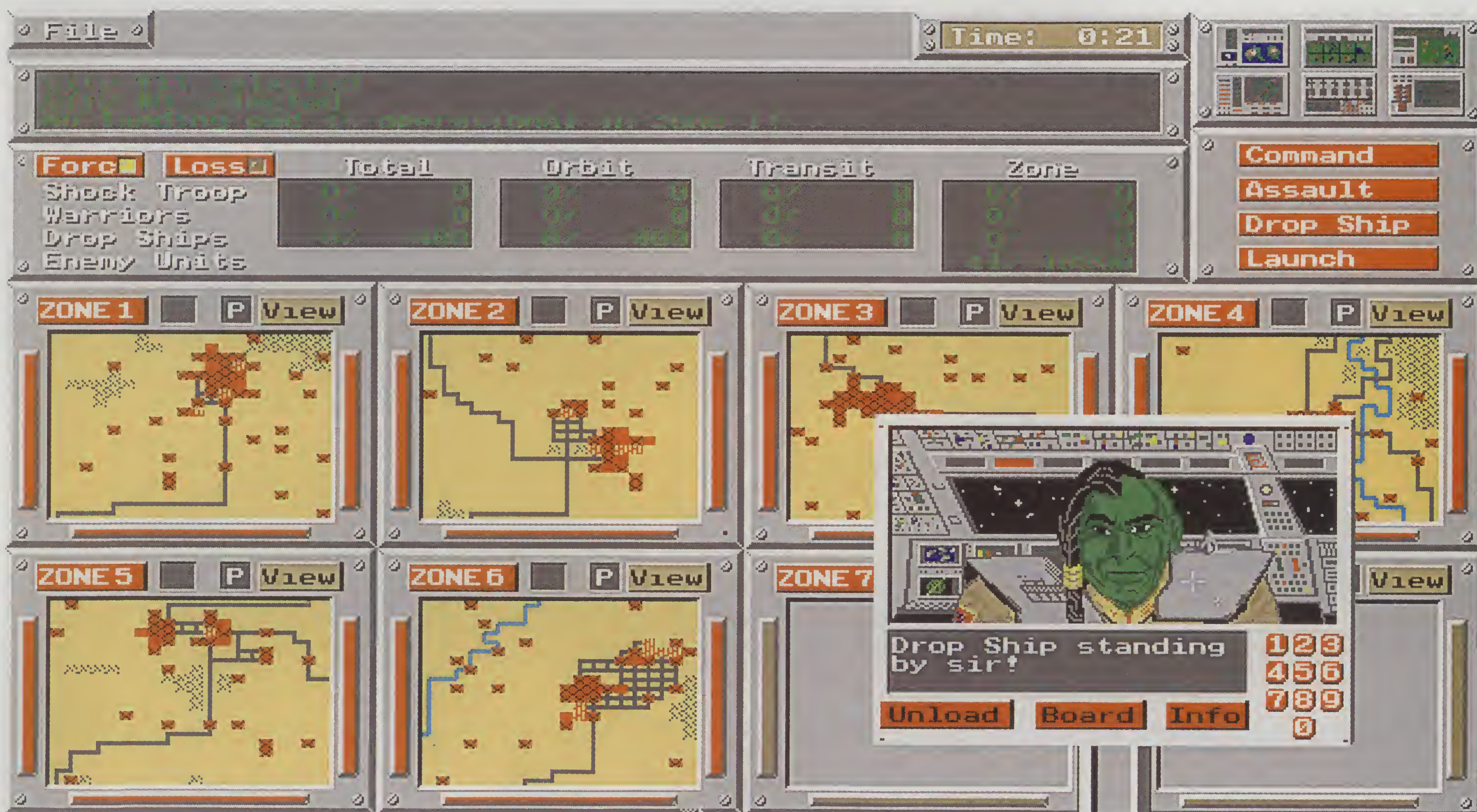


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Reader Service No. 100

Levelling the Planets

Dean Bakeris on strategy and tactics for Mindcraft's Star Legions



Star Legions is a derivative of the planetary invasion module in **Star Fleet II - Krellan Commander**. It was designed by Trevor Sorensen, and the original module was co-authored by Mark Baldwin. Sorensen's new company, Supernova Creations, transformed the original module into a new stand-alone game. Its graphics and user interface were completely redone by Brett Keeton, and the game play and features were greatly enhanced.

Star Legions is a real-time planetary invasion simulation (as opposed to turn-based games like **Empire**). Real-time combat simulations, especially where the player can control several battles (invasion zones) simultaneously, calls for a whole new philosophy of strategy and tactics that may be unfamiliar to many, even veteran, traditional computer wargame generals. Although the **Star Legions** manual contains many useful techniques, this article presents even more tips that might just make the difference in obtaining the coveted, but elusive, *Hero of the Empire Gold Skull* decoration.

While the first few missions may seem easy, don't be fooled - it gets harder. Most low tech level (1-4) planets can be conquered with shock troops alone. There is no need for armored warriors and drop ships. On these early missions, gain familiarity with invasion control and techniques. Try to control as many invasion zones at once as possible to develop multiple zone invasion skills. An effective commander will use his forces in several zones at once.

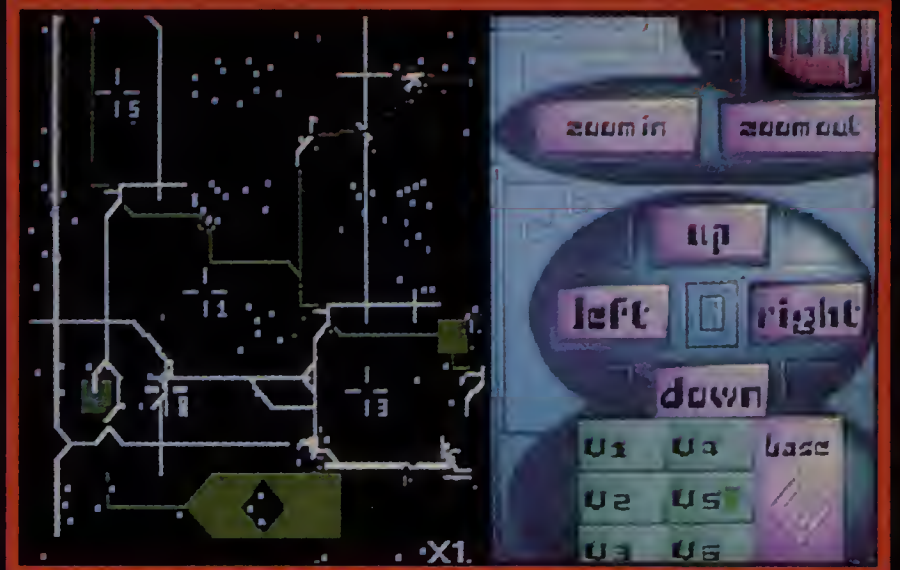
Developing skills

The most efficient way to conquer a zone on low tech level planets is to capture the city and village areas. Beam shock troops down to quadrants with city areas in them. If city areas are located in different quadrants, split the forces. Use the 'capture' command for the quickest victory.

One objective on low tech level planets is to increase the

Star Legions is published by Mindcraft and was reviewed in issue 25

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legions' battle ratings, which start at 70%. A legion's battle rating is increased by earning battle honors. Battle honors are based on the amount of combat in which the legion engages. Battle hardened troops will be necessary to defeat UGA regular forces encountered later. Use the 'reduce' command to have the cohorts target enemy forces. This increases the number of battles the legion has and the number of battle honors earned. This tactic should be balanced against the fact that targeting forces, rather than taking over cities, will increase the invasion time. However, time is not too critical a factor at these lower tech levels. This strategy will not work on tech level 1 planets since there are no enemy forces - just peaceful villages for the taking.

Experiment with manual control of a drop ship and the loading of warriors on a tech level 4 planet since there are no air defenses. If a particular zone has proven strong against shock troops, build a landing pad, load a drop ship with warriors, and launch it to the desired zone. The warriors will deploy and quickly defeat the local militia. Don't forget to withdraw the shock troops after the warrior cohorts deploy (this is a good habit to develop).

Earning glory on high tech planets

The Krellan universe is one of 'conquest and glory' and this is where the action heats up. A tech level 5 planet may possibly be defeated with shock troops alone, but it will be costly. On higher tech level planets, shock troops will no longer suffice. Warrior cohorts will have to be transported to the planet's surface via drop ships.

The two most important rules to follow at the higher tech levels (5-7) are:

- Don't waste shock troops
Shock troops are a valuable asset which, when depleted, will leave the Krellans hanging in space with no way to open up new invasion zones. Beam unneeded or badly outnumbered shock troops back to the ship as soon as possible.
- Eliminate surface to air lasers (SALs)
SALs can take out a drop ship and eliminate up to six warrior cohorts in one stroke - a substantial loss! It is critical for the player to knock out the SALs before trying to land a drop ship.

After initially selecting the eight invasion zones, be sure to turn on auto reinforce (AR) in the Drop Ship Control Panel. Remember that AR is zone specific, and if a city is deselected and a new one selected, the AR will be off for that new invasion zone.

Shock recovery

Shock troops move quicker than local militia or UGA Regulars, so they always have an edge in getting to places. While moving cohorts directly, try to go around forts. They can pin down the cohorts, interfering with them reaching their objective.

Move the feint troops to the edge of the zone away from the second wave - preferably onto rough terrain, since the terrain defense factor will help them defend against enemy counterattack. The feint troops may lose one or more cohorts,

but this is acceptable if the second wave completes its mission.

To recover the shock troops from the feint wave, order each shock troop cohort to withdraw just before an enemy unit moves adjacent. The cohort will beam up before the enemy can attack. Or let them fight to the death to keep the enemy occupied, but wasting a large number of shock troops is not recommended. Don't give orders to the cohorts (especially 'withdraw' and 'move to') and forget about them - Krellans cohort commanders are renowned for their disdain to orders and may revert back to local command after they come into serious contact with the enemy.

If a city is small but heavily defended, send in a few shock troops and immediately move them to the corner opposite the city. These troops must be prepared to fight to the death. When most of the enemy units are counterattacking the shock troops, send in a large assault force onto the city (if possible) or between the enemy and the city. Be sure to select the 'capture' command. With any luck, the city will be captured before all the shock troops are destroyed. If not...

Do not build a landing pad adjacent to the edge of the zone. The cohorts from the drop ship will not be able to all deploy at once. One trick is to build a landing pad and then withdraw all Krellan units. If all the troops leave the zone before the enemy moves adjacent to the landing pad, the enemy may retreat back to the city and leave the pad undisturbed.

Reinforcements

If a zone has an operational shield, beaming in one shock troop cohort will cause enemy units to move towards the cohort. If the shock troop is beamed back up after enemy movement is detected, the enemy units will withdraw to under the shield (protection from bombardment). This could leave open spaces for a wave of shock troops to beam down and build a landing pad. Form a defensive line between the cohort building the pad and the enemy units.

Just before the first drop ship lands, change the zone command to 'standard' or 'capture'. Use 'standard' if enemy units are nearby or else the cohorts may move off towards the city and leave the pad open to destruction. If an enemy unit is next to an empty pad (especially if there are no cohorts next to the enemy to engage him in combat), go to the Drop Ship Control Panel, deselect AR for that zone and order the drop ship to return. Otherwise, the drop ship and its cohorts may be destroyed if it lands while the enemy is attacking the pad.

If the invasion is going badly (obviously due to incompetent subordinates) and help will be needed, do not wait until the last minute to call KHQ. It takes a while for new troopships to arrive at the planet and sitting around idle will not help the mission rating. On a tech level 7 UGA planet, an extra troopship or two is usually necessary. Although calling for and receiving help hurts the mission rating slightly, it's better than failing.

Even when attacking from a position of strength (ie the bad guys are outnumbered), don't be afraid to send reinforcements. Fewer men will be lost by completely overpowering the foe. These are just a few of hints to use against the weak and pitiful UGA forces. There are many more strategies and tactics than outlined here. Be sneaky, find the weak spots, and show no mercy! Remember that only the strong survive in the Krellan Empire! □

Pacific War

The monster returns

By John Van Valer



SSI's annual Gary Grigsby monster wargame release continues in 1992 with **Pacific War**. The entire conflict in the Pacific between the Japanese Empire and the Allies during World War II is covered from December 1941 to August 1945. The map alone runs from Eastern India to the Western United States and from Alaska to New Zealand. Game scale is one week per turn. Fighting units are represented down to the individual ship, plane, submarine, tank, artillery piece, and infantry squad. **Pacific War** is truly a monster game.

Design challenge

The campaign in the Pacific has been a very difficult subject to translate into game form. The enormous geographical area alone has challenged designers with the simple question of scale. It's hard to simulate a major naval engagement of forty ships with a game scale of several hundred miles per hex. The war effort can simply become too abstract in an easily playable simulation form. The sheer scope of logistical efforts, moving hundreds of

thousands of men, thousands aircraft, and millions of tons of supplies to remote locations across an entire ocean, often became games unto themselves - and not very exciting ones at that.

Unlike its predecessors (**Western Front** etc), **Pacific War** adds numerous informational and graphic windows that appear with a single mouse click. Despite these welcome enhancements, there are still several dozen commands to master and the interface does not present them well. The manual needs to be consulted for more details about a command - a considerable step backward for modern computer wargames.

The most significant new command to the system is the Battle command. This allows one to review, in detail, the result of all air, sea, and land engagements during the past turn. While only briefly mentioned in the manual, this significant command allows players to save games and play-by-mail or e-mail, something not possible in the other games in this series. One player can watch the battles take place, finish the turn, and then exchange the saved game (about 100K) with another player who can then review each

battle and plan his portion of the turn.

Scenarios include 1941, 1942, Guadalcanal, Marianas, and Leyte Gulf campaign games. The two shorter scenarios are Rising Sun (December 1941-March 1942) and Coral Sea/Midway (May-June 1942). SSI has actually included a tutorial that covers the beginning of the Guadalcanal campaign. This tutorial is a welcome addition, especially due to the complexity of **Pacific War**, but only covers one turn and is insufficient for those not already familiar with the game system.

Computer assist

Actual combat operations in the Pacific are divided up into areas of responsibility by headquarters command. Each side has a number of headquarters representing an army, fleet, or specific geographical region, through which one assigns objectives and, ultimately, individual unit orders. Players can control everything or rely on some level of computer assistance in managing headquarters operations.

For example, to effect operations in the Guadalcanal area, the Allied player must work through the South Pacific headquarters to direct its subordinate units to their objectives. Alternatively, the player could simply tell the headquarters the regional objective is the island of Guadalcanal and let the computer assistant issue unit orders. This system is historically accurate and generally makes the game easier to play.

Whereas **Western Front** used political points to allow various actions, **Pacific War** uses preparation points to represent logistical and planning efforts. Land movement and combat is not hex based, as in Grigsby's previous games, but is area based. Since most of the battles in the war were fought in and around specific objectives due to geography and very rough terrain, traditional hex to hex combat is inappropriate for the game's scale.

Follow the leader

Successful combat will almost always necessitate the involvement of a strong leader. **Pacific War** includes numerous leaders for both sides. Leaders are assigned to individual task forces, air groups, combat formations, and headquarters. As the war progresses, new leaders will become available. Leaders can be reassigned and

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Veil of Darkness



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even killed during the game.

The economic side of **Pacific War** is disappointing. Since the entire war in the Pacific is covered, it would make sense to allow the Japanese player and even the Allied player, to some extent, to choose what type of units will be produced. Unfortunately, players are limited to historical production in the form of reinforcements.

Choosing help for either side at the start of the game will accelerate reinforcements. Overall, this part of the game is far too rigid in structure and does not allow any player experimentation with historical force mix. What if Japan had produced more carriers, better submarines, etc?

On the other hand, the supply and logistical system is quite good. The computer handle supply for both sides. The computer forms routine convoys to carry fuel, supplies, resources, and oil to bases all over the map. If the computer cannot provide supply to a base due to potential enemy air or naval activity, the player can easily find the base and setup a special supply convoy for it. Without such a system, **Pacific War** would suffer the same

fate of some of its board wargame ancestors and be virtually unplayable due to the enormous complexity of the convoy system.

The right signals

Another crucial area the game succeeds in is Signals Intelligence (SIGINT). This represents the very successful historical effort by the Allies to intercept and decipher Japanese communications. Quite often the success of a game simulating the Pacific war can be based solely on how it handles this aspect. As with supply, Grigsby's efforts here are entirely successful. Each turn, the Allied player can select Japanese units and see if his code breakers have come up with any information on their force composition, mission, or leader.

Is everything in this game, including the kitchen sink? Well, no. There is at least one significant item missing. A printed reference map. Even the most avid follower of the Pacific campaign would have a hard time remembering the name and location of every island, city,

and base on a map that covers almost one-half of the planet's surface. And yet, as they did in **Western Front**, SSI has elected not to include what would have been a handy playing aid.

As with most of SSI's wargames, **Pacific War** is intended for a very specific audience, the serious or hard-core wargamer, who has both the time and patience to invest in the game. A full game with full human control over all of one side's forces could easily take 200 hours to complete. With a modern interface and various other computer specific enhancements, **Pacific War** could have had broader appeal. Grigsby's efforts as the sole designer and programmer for the game are monumental, but it needs the support of a larger team and it seems that SSI was not interested in providing that extra assistance.

Pacific War is a landmark computer wargame in that it successfully handles one of the most difficult and cumbersome board wargame subjects but, unfortunately, there may not be all that many gamers willing to make the effort that **Pacific War** demands. Those up to the task, however, will be rewarded. □

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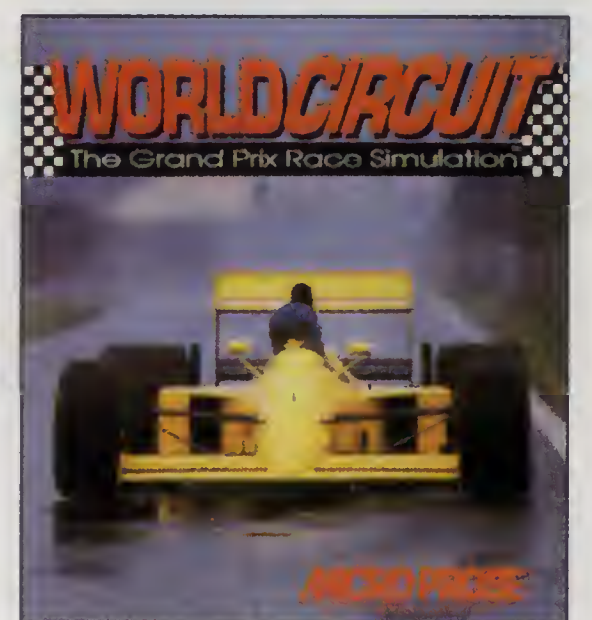


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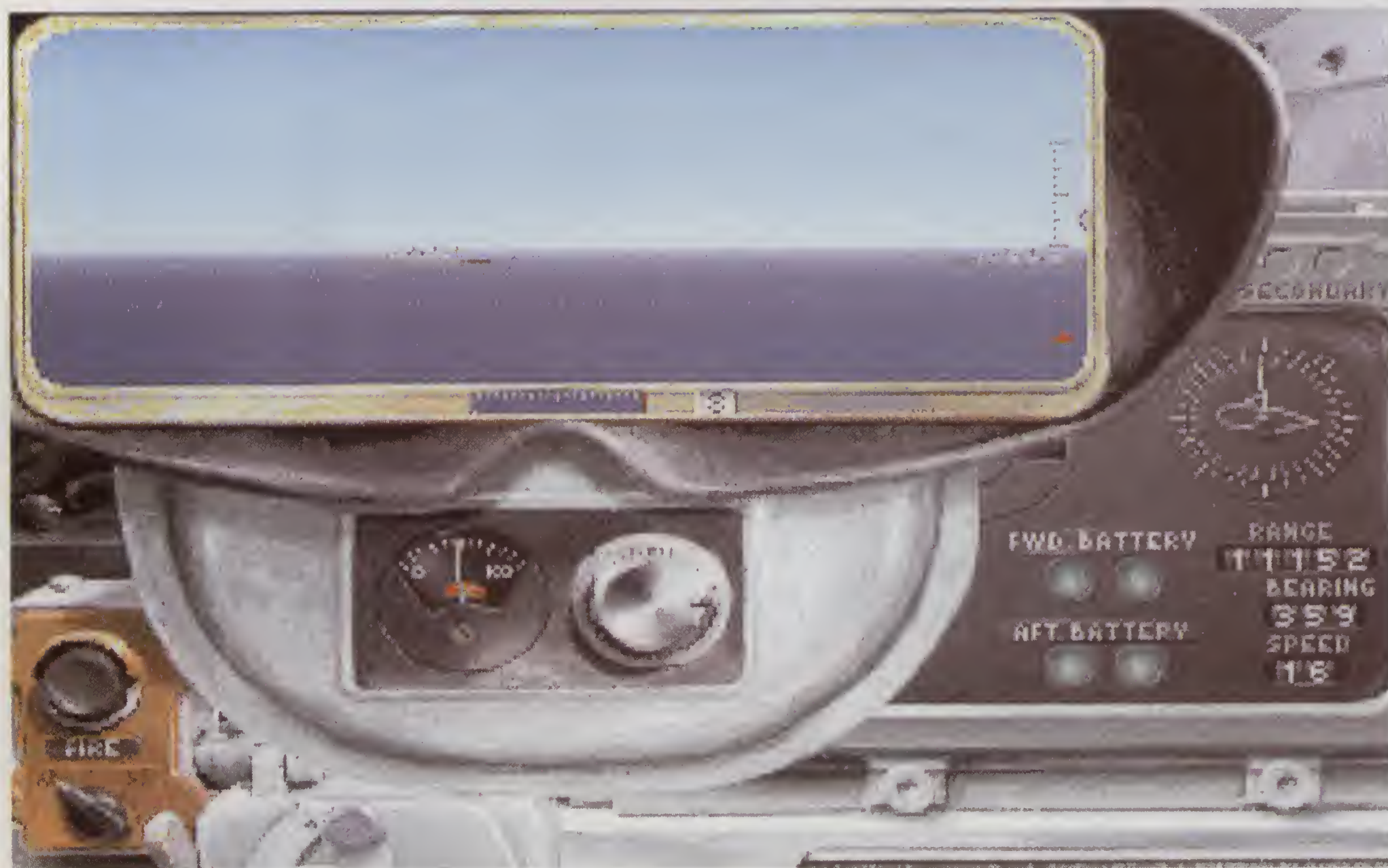
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QAG

Task Force 1942

Battles for Guadalcanal

By John Van Valer



a number of different levels. They can take the role of task force commander and issue orders to his various ship divisions, play at the level a division commander, or command an individual ship. Most players will probably want try all the roles at some time during a battle. Issuing formation and heading orders are fine, but when the shooting starts, it's always fun to jump to the lead ship try to save the day.

Overall battle management is done on a tactical chart of the engagement area. Here, players can reset the scale and time rate of the battle while they maneuver their divisions of ships toward the enemy. The relative positions of ships are displayed and as enemy ships are spotted, they appear on the chart. Hits, near misses, and torpedo wakes also appear during the course of battle. As new ship formations are chosen, the ships maneuver to their newly assigned positions and a new formation appears. Since most of the battles are fought near land, there are often small islands and portions of larger islands to consider during maneuvers. The interface at this level is primarily mouse driven. Clicking on a friendly ship division brings up information about the division's heading, speed and composition.

Action stations

At the individual ship level of command, the player is given a first person perspective of the action. Starting at the ship's bridge, one can move to torpedo director, damage control, ship's wheel, observer, binocular, engine telegraph, and gun director stations. A ship's charts station allows the player to return to the tactical chart level. At the gun director station, for example, the player can spot enemy ships, engage the targeting computer and open fire with both main and secondary guns on the enemy.

The observer view allows a player to go outside the ship and view it from a reconnaissance plane perspective. The ship can be zoomed in on and circled. While not useful for most combat situations, the view is rather spectacular - especially during night engagements.

TF1942 uses the standard Microprose VGA filled polygon graphics to display the ships rather than bitmaps, as in SSI's **Great Naval Battles**. The overall effect is quite nice and only enhances the game's feel. While bitmaps allow more fine detail, such as individual gun barrels on a ship's turret, the polygon graphics require less processing power so the game should run better on slower PCs.

Designed by
Lawrence Schlick

Published by
Microprose

Systems
PC

Graphics
VGA, EGA

Supports
Mouse, most
soundcards

Notes

This review was based on late beta. Problems were experienced with the copy protection scheme, though Microprose assured us that these would be corrected in the finished version

The beautiful opening action scene of a destroyer in combat alone makes Microprose's **Task Force 1942 (TF1942)** worth looking at for anyone interested in naval simulations. Combined with this with newsreel-style reports throughout the game, and **TF1942** offers tremendous flavor for the battles it portrays. Of course, the second question is: how well does it actually model the topic?

Scenario builder

Task Force 1942 recreates the naval battles between American and Japanese forces in the Guadalcanal area from August until December 1942. American forces invaded the island of Guadalcanal in August 1942 in an attempt to stop Japanese expansion in the Solomon Islands and retake this strategically important island. For the rest of the year, American and Japanese task forces attempted to resupply their respective forces on the island resulting in many extremely ferocious day and night-time naval battles.

Ships of all types, from transports and destroyers up to the mighty battleships, are at the players' disposal.

There are three different options for play. Historical scenarios allow players to try their hand at one of several battles around Guadalcanal while the campaign game recreates five months of the conflict. Alternatively, players can create their own battles with the simulated encounter option. Virtually all the non-carrier surface class warships of the U.S. and Japanese navies are included in the game's database so there are quite a variety of possible battles. If things haven't gone well in a historical scenario, players can vent their frustrations by taking command of a battleship and go destroyer hunting in one of the custom scenarios.

On the surface

The heart of the game is the surface battle simulator. Similar in many respects to Microprose's earlier **M1 Tank Platoon**, players are involved in the battles at

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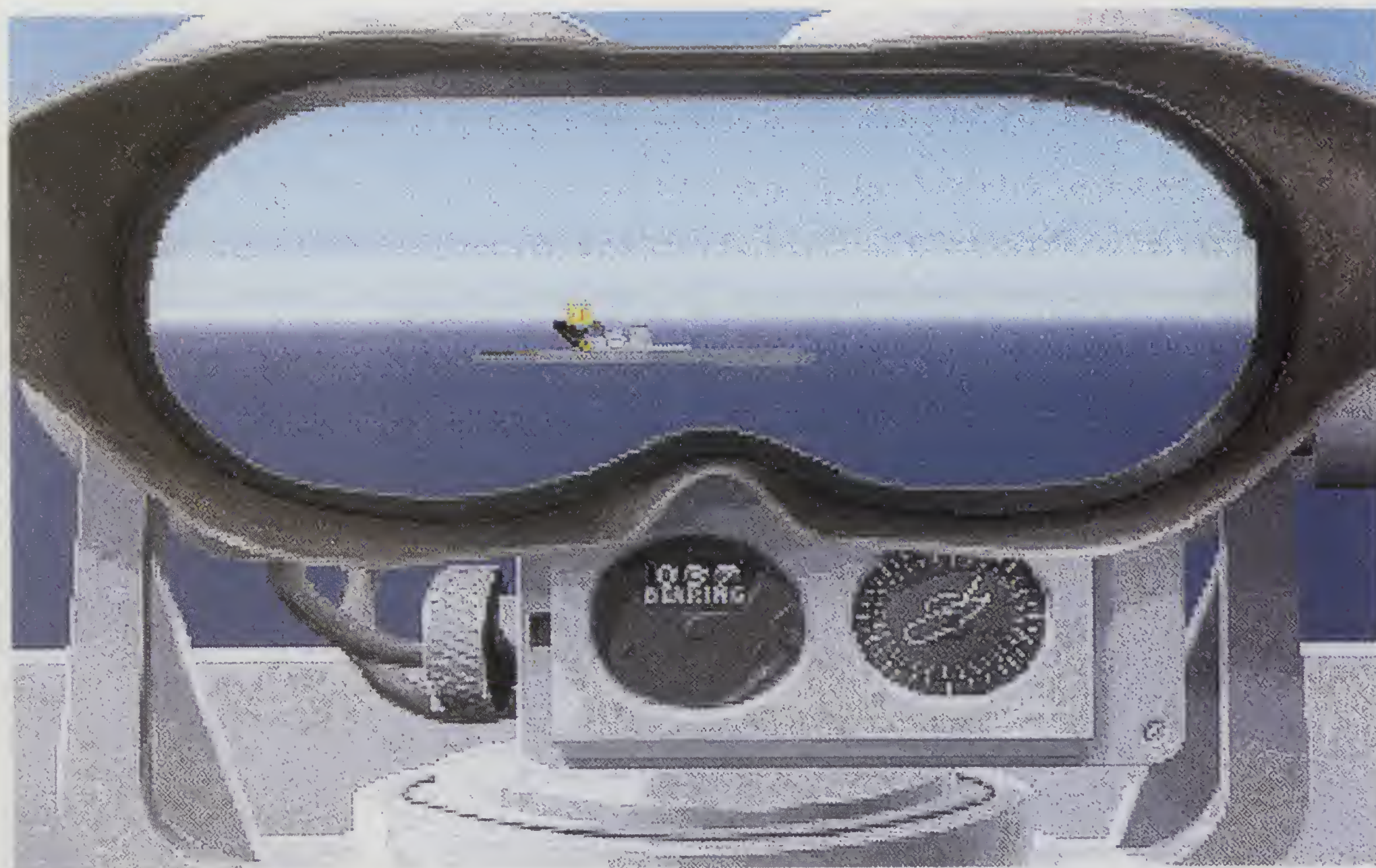
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QAH

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Microprose appears to have spent a fair amount of time creating detail for each ship type as they are generally distinguishable from each other when viewed from the binocular or gun director stations. As a ship takes damage, fires and smoke will appear onboard. Near misses are depicted with large splashes in the water nearby. When firing guns, each gun salvo is shown hurtling toward the enemy ship. Large battles night battles are quite spectacular with all the flares, salvos, and ships on fire. Quite a fireworks show!

Batteries included

There are a few problems with the ship level first person interface, however. Most annoying is the fact that as one moves from station to station, the station's settings are not retained. For example, if the player spends a few minutes setting up a firing solution at the gun director and decides to go look at the ship's charts to see how the rest of the battle is going, the gun director settings are lost upon return! While the gun director also allows targeting of a specific ship and will automatically track it while the player is at the station, it does not allow tracking of a player specified target. In the case of two enemy ships passing each other, the gun director will track the first one it 'sees' and not allow the player to specify which ship he really wants to track. The result is confusion over which ship the targeting solution is meant for and a number of

wasted salvos during the discovery process. On ships with primary and secondary batteries, there is no way to target separately for each battery. It can be done manually, but is probably too tedious and cumbersome for most players.

Another point of frustration for some will be the size of many of the battles. Each side will usually have a dozen or so ships. Unlike the traditional flight simulators where players are only concerned with their aircraft, in **TF1942** there are lots of ships to command and moving from ship to ship in the first person mode is not an effective way to manage a battle. There is simply too much to do.

Damaging effect

From an authenticity standpoint, there are a several questions to be answered. The manual includes a good deal of data and a few lines of commentary for each ship class, but the critical data is in too many different parts of the manual. As it stands now, there is simply too much hunting through the manual to find out this information.

The aspect most lacking in the game is in the area of damage control. Damage to ship systems is denoted with a status light in the damage screen as well as some accompanying text detailing general ship condition. While repair time varies with current extent of ship damage, no estimate of repair time or other status reports are given. Systems will just suddenly start

working as they are repaired. If a ship's guns are out of action, for example, players have no way of knowing how long repair might take. Messages from repair crews, or ship status updates from other officers onboard would go a long way toward making the players feel that they are not all alone on the ship and out of touch with the crew.

Aircraft do not appear during engagements and are only used in the campaign game. The computer controls actual strikes while the player can specify how many aircraft should be on search missions. Historically, most of the battles were at night because of the threat of air power during the day. If ships are caught at sea during the day, a message box will appear and mention that a task force has been attacked by aircraft.

Unlike many other simulators where the enemy is easy to distinguish and there is little 'fog of war', **TF1942** does a very good job of portraying the confusion and dangers of multi-ship night engagements. 'Friendly fire' against friendly ships was a major problem historically and is a real danger in the game as well. Distinguishing friendly ships from enemy ships at night, under fire, and with lots of smoke from other ships can be as difficult in the game as it was historically. The confusion that plagued most of the surface action around Guadalcanal is handled well in **TF1942** and helps to distinguish it from most other simulators. Players feel that they are really involved in the action.

First installment

Despite some interface problems, and a few gray areas about game data, **TF1942** is very enjoyable and approachable for both experienced naval gamers and newcomers to simulation games. The feeling of player involvement is quite high and the battles themselves are generally quite interesting and worth replaying.

For the true grognard, the campaign game promises many of hours of play and more than a few challenges. Players should take some time to look at the manual and check supplemental documentation for data, such as commander descriptions and ratings, that were left out of the manual. The designers have stated that **TF1942** is only the first of a series of naval simulators from Microprose, with the next installment to be an aircraft carrier game the covers both plane-to-plane and plane-to-ship combat.

In the interim, **TF1942** should keep players very busy. □

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CASTLES ARE FOR KEEPS



Brian Walker on strategy and tactics for QQP's Conquered Kingdoms

The key to success in QQP's excellent game is understanding the combat system which uses a variant on the 'scissors, paper stone,' formula. Fortunately there is a good on-line guide to help players learn what kills what in addition to the helpful manual. But what units to buy, when, and which offer the best value for money? These are the questions that this article will attempt to answer before addressing some of the broader strategies that may be employed.

Swordsman

The cannon fodder of the game. Good for sentry and duties and guarding resources until they become permanent.

Lancers

Useful, but don't buy or build too many unless the opponent has a lot of cavalry. Lancers are the only units which don't require the use of gold to buy. So when overstocked with coal and wood, snap 'em up.

Archers

Definitely a 'best buy'. Their ranged fire can prove invaluable and is especially effective when defending a castle. Archers can also fire from boats. Their own defences are quite weak so be sure to keep them out of the front line.

Knights

Good in hand-to-hand combat and thus excellent at defending the more valuable towns.

Cavalry

Relatively expensive but good in the early part of the game where their fast movement is handy for grabbing resources and towns quickly. Use them to trample archers but keep them away from lancers and trolls.

Catapults

Hopeless on defence, catapults should always be protected by a front line. Castles are probably their spiritual home.

Trolls

Despite their reputation for being one brick short of a load, the much maligned trolls are useful in all sorts of situations. They can soak up damage and even possess powers of regeneration. They are especially good guarding the castle gates when the enemy tries to storm through. They also frighten cavalry to death.

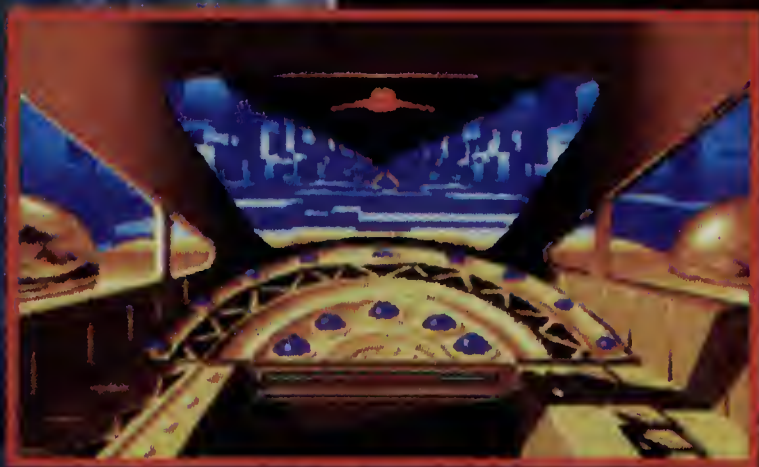
Ogres

Powerful, but expensive and clumsy, the ogres star quality is ranged fire. I prefer to buy trolls and pocket the change.

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Gargoyles

Their ability to fly makes them one of the cheapest unit with this invaluable ability so don't skimp on these, especially if the map features a lot of water. Place them as close to a castle as possible when setting up and then use them to try and take it on the first turn. Gargoyles also make excellent reinforcements when one's army is attacking another castle.

Rogs

They're green, they're fat, they're ugly. They're also fairly useless. Don't waste money on these slimy creatures.

Boats

The number bought should depend on which scenario is being played. Unwise to build them if there is no water.

Phantoms

Something of a risky buy. Perhaps worth buying one at the outset and stationing it in the middle of the main army. Should always be on hand for a major battles where it's powers of healing can be used to maximum effect.

Wizards

Expensive, but very effective if used carefully. Just watch those fireballs fry opponents. Once a fireball has been launched wizards should retreat to a safe haven (preferably a castle keep) to regenerate some 'manna'. Their ability to teleport both themselves and adjacent units transforms such a group into a sort of medieval S.W.A.T team, capable of giving marauders a nasty surprise.

Dragons

Despite their high defence rating dragons can quickly be downed by arrows. Providing that they can be kept away from these missiles, they are a good buy and especially effective when breathing heavily on towns behind enemy lines

Resources

The most valuable resource is gold. No gold, no win. Go for gold first if a choice exists. Before buying units at the outset, scroll around the map and check what's within grabbing distance. Place the cavalry as close as possible to any resources spotted so that they can get there at a gallop as soon as the movement phase begins. Only use flying creatures, such as gargoyles, for this task if mountains or forests obstruct the path of land based units. Stomp on any enemy unit that looks to be camped out on a resource. By draining the enemy of permanent resources, their armies will atrophy.

General strategy

It's essential to get off to a good start because once behind it's tough to catch up. Part of the reason for this is the near-impregnable nature of the castles (at least in the higher levels of the game). Even with average resources it should not be difficult to get either archers or catapults built quickly and defending the castle stoutly.

Getting off to a flyer means capturing castles quickly. To do this station the fastest units as close as possible to a castle and aim to get at least one in the keep. If a castle is some distance away then use the wizard's teleport facility to get there, making sure that he take a few pals along with him. Knowing when to do a U-turn is also very important. If the enemy has got units in the castle keep first and looks to have

solid back-up, then accept that discretion is the better part of valor and take off at a respectable clip.

In the early stages of the game, there is usually a pressing need to defend castles. If this is the case, and if ever the castle is placed under siege, then buy archers and catapults. Once the castle has been secured, buy cavalry assuming normal terrain. These are among the fastest units and so can reach valuable resources quickly. If things are looking good around the half stage, then save up to buy a dragon. This is the fastest and most efficient way of mopping up the enemy.

Buy a gargoyle

If a particular area is in need of urgent assistance and the funds are not immediately available to buy dragons, then buy gargoyles and place them in the nearest castle. Terrain makes no difference to these cavalry with fins, they can reach the battlefield very quickly and are extremely effective against most units (especially archers).

One of the key factors in winning the game is to make sure that opponents casualties are much higher than one's own. With this in mind, don't hesitate to retreat when it's clear opponents have the upper hand. Save units for a favorable occasion rather than trying to tough it out or engaging in kamikaze attacks.

Attacking castles

In days of yore, the warlords of the time when seeking to storm enemy fortresses, didn't just send who happened to be nearest. The garrison was scouted and the attack carefully planned. Strategy in **Conquered Kingdoms** should be no different. Dispatch a spy to discover enemy defences and thus avoid; (a) the 'sledgehammer to crack a nut' syndrome, and (b) getting wiped out.

Generally the best units to capture an enemy castle are dragons and catapults (to beat down the gates) and gargoyles (to take out the archers). If the castle is well defended by a variety of units, then don't attack until an army can be assembled that is approximately 25% greater in quality and quantity. This is necessary because the castle offers recuperative facilities for injured occupants.

Finally

- Always move units with ranged fire one or two spaces away from an enemy unit, and never into the *same* space. This way they get a 'free' hit as well as forcing enemies to move (often away from a points scoring town) if they want to get a return shot.
- When enemy dragons are in the vicinity, avoid placing two units in the same square. Dragons can inflict damage on both during the combat phases.
- Coastal towns should be garrisoned by units with ranged fire to prevent them being used for target practice by dragons that possess the ability to station themselves over water. Of course, if opponents have not grasped this then attack coastal towns with dragons, stationing them 'in the water' out of the attack range of land based units.
- If several resources are within close proximity, don't hesitate to rotate them rather than sitting on each one until the resources becomes permanent.
- Despite the manual's declaration that a fireball will inflict damage on 'every unit in and 1 square around target', fireballs only affect *enemy* units. 'Friendly fire' it seems, is a relatively modern concept. □

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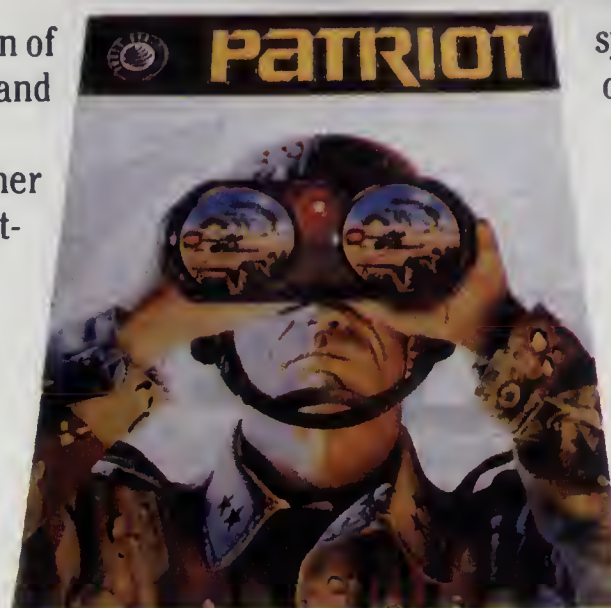


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Reader Service No. 65

Star Control II

The Ur-Quan Masters

By Lee Johnson

Star Control II: The Ur-Quan Masters represents a radical departure from its predecessor, *Star Control*. Where *Star Control* was a thin strategic game wrapped around an exciting arcade shoot-out in space, *Star Control II* is a full-fledged role playing space adventure--which just happens to use the familiar arcade element as its combat system. In fact, *Star Control II* comes with *two* programs: The full adventure game; and a separate combat-only 'SuperMelee' game which allows the player to blast it out against a computer opponent, or against another human.

Back to the cave

Star Control II's designers have done an excellent job of integrating the fiction from the original *Star Control* manual into a detailed and consistent 'future history'. All of the original races of the Alliance of Free Stars and their rivals, the Ur-Quan Hierarchy, figure in the story, along with a number of new races, some friendly, some not. And of course, each new race brings with it a new ship design for the battle sequences.

The story begins during the *Star Control* time frame, in the last days of the war. In the nearby Vela star system, an Earthling captain discovers a strange underground installation built by the Precursors, an extinct race which occupied this region of space a quarter of a million years ago. Earth dispatches a scientific expedition to study the installation, but when the Ur-Quan are discovered speeding towards the settlement on Vela II, the scientists, unwilling to abandon this amazing find, erase all traces of their presence and retreat to the cave.

Months later, they venture back to the surface, colonising the world and continuing their study of the Precursor base. It takes them ten years to unlock the secrets of the base's ancient computer, and another ten years for the computer to fulfil its primary function: the construction of a Precursor starship.

The player assumes the role of the young captain chosen to bring the ship back to Earth, which has not been heard from in twenty years. Alas, upon arriving in Earth's solar system, one soon discovers that the war did not end well for the Alliance. Rather than fight for the Ur-Quan, the vanquished people of Earth elected to be confined to the planet, sealed in by an impenetrable 'slave shield'. A lonely space station circling the Earth becomes the player's base of operations.



The objective: to enlist a new alliance, overthrow the Ur-Quan, and restore freedom to this corner of the galaxy.

Mouse trap

Star Control II is set in a region of space containing hundreds of stars. A colourful printed star map (20 years out of date!) is provided for navigational purposes. This is supplemented by an on-line star map, which doubles as a strategic chart. The user interface is similar to the original, as is the combat portion of the game. Menu selections and starship controls may use either the keyboard or a joystick. A separate utility program allows the player to customise the key layouts used during combat. Oddly, *Star Control II* does not support a mouse, even though tasks such as navigation on the star map could benefit from one.

In the full game, there is the option of controlling the combat sequences manually, or assigning the computer to fly

them. This feature is sure to please those players who would prefer to concentrate on exploration instead of arcade-game duels.

Tunes to hum

Music is almost always present during the game. *Star Control II* boasts nearly an hour of digital music, and over fifty digital sound effects. Alien races have their own musical themes, some of which are quite catchy; in addition, there are a number of incidental themes for travelling and combat.

The music and sound effects provide an enhanced playing atmosphere, and contribute greatly to the enjoyment of the game.

Star Control II is an exceedingly well-produced, fast-paced, and entertaining space adventure and action game. It represents the current state of the art in a genre which was pioneered by *Starflight* over six years ago. □

Designed by

Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III

Published by

Accolade

Systems

IBM PC

Graphics

256 colour VGA, MCGA

Sound

Most popular sound cards

Supports

Keyboard, joystick

Players

1 player (in adventure game); 1 or 2 players (in SuperMelee game)

The Best of 1992 . . .

Strategy

by Brian Walker

The Nominees

Civilization

Conquered Kingdoms

Siege

The Winner

Civilization



Compared to the other categories covered in this feature 1992 has been a moderate one for strategy games, at least in terms of quantity. However, given the selection of the above nominees one can hardly complain about quality. **Civilization** arrived last December and immediately dwarfed all that it had gone before it. So much has already been written about it that there's really little left to add. Suffice to say that it wins the Strategy Game of the Year title at a canter.

Following the Microprose release there was something of a lull; a sense of anti-climax, until, that is, the release of **Siege**, a real-time fantasy game from Mindcraft that has provided this excellent company with their biggest ever hit. On the face of it, its success was surprising. Real-time is not a universally popular mode amongst strategy gamers who, by definition almost, like time to ponder their moves. The graphics were unexceptional proving that when it comes to visual flash vs gameplay in this genre, the latter will win out every time.

Although arriving late in the year, **Conquered Kingdoms** again showed that when it comes to producing consistently solid strategy games, QQP have few equals. Modern play, score histories, and, best of all, strong computer opponents, are becoming QQP's trademark. 1993 should see this company going from strength to strength when the sequels to both **The**

Perfect General and **The Lost Admiral** are released.

In the 'I could have been a contender' stakes, Dan Bunten's **Global Conquest** drew very mixed reactions. Some dismissed it as a 'silly' game, itself a daft criticism which implies that games have to be 'serious' to be good. If anything it was too lightweight (despite spawning an improbable though excellent book by Alan Emrich), a sort of pared down version of **Empire**.

A-Train from Maxis had its admirers, though the lack of anything approaching opponents worked against it. The decision to bypass these seem to stem from the need to protect Maxis reputation as the purveyor of 'software toys', rather than being a natural part of the design. **Crisis in the Kremlin** and **Global Effect** look like being buried with the epitaph: 'They Were Worthy but Dull.' Impressions from the UK opened a US office and almost immediately had a mini-hit with **Air Bucks**. Although our reviewer did not particularly care for it, the company were quick to take on board some of his (and that of others) criticisms and issue an upgrade. Providing that they beef up their AI and smarten up the graphics, the company could have further success in 1993.

Quite aside from the type of strategy games described above, there is another breed of game that is intended to appeal to the cerebral in us - the 'traditional' offerings, such as chess and other classic board games, so let us spare a thought for these which are often regarded as the poor relations of their more thematically oriented big brothers.

Virgin Games seemed to have carved out a niche of converting of famous boardgames to computer, and a fine job they have made of it. **Scrabble** and **Monopoly**, are both first rate software implementations of the originals, making them nominees for the best of the year. Chess programs appear to have reached a plateau, after which it becomes a question of interface and options.

The biggest advances in this area have been made in the oriental game of Go, strangely enough. Strange, because the game is both immensely simple and complex at the same time. One would think this would be enough to baffle any programmer, but Ishi Press and Toyogo have been battling away for years with **The Many Faces of Go** and **Nemesis V 5.0** respectively. It's a very close call between these two, but the award of Traditional Game of the Year goes to Toyogo's **Nemesis V 5.0** for being an all encompassing tutor as well as a powerful game.

No matter what one's tastes are in strategy games, 1993 already looks like being a terrific year. Three Sixty are showing the way graphically with their outstanding SVGA artwork, while QQP offer solid-as-a-rock products. On top of this **Empire De Luxe** is due any day now, while Sid Meier's US Civil War game for Microprose should provide the other bookend to a year in which outstanding promise should be fully realised. □



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Reader Service No. 4

The Best of 1992 . . .

Wargames

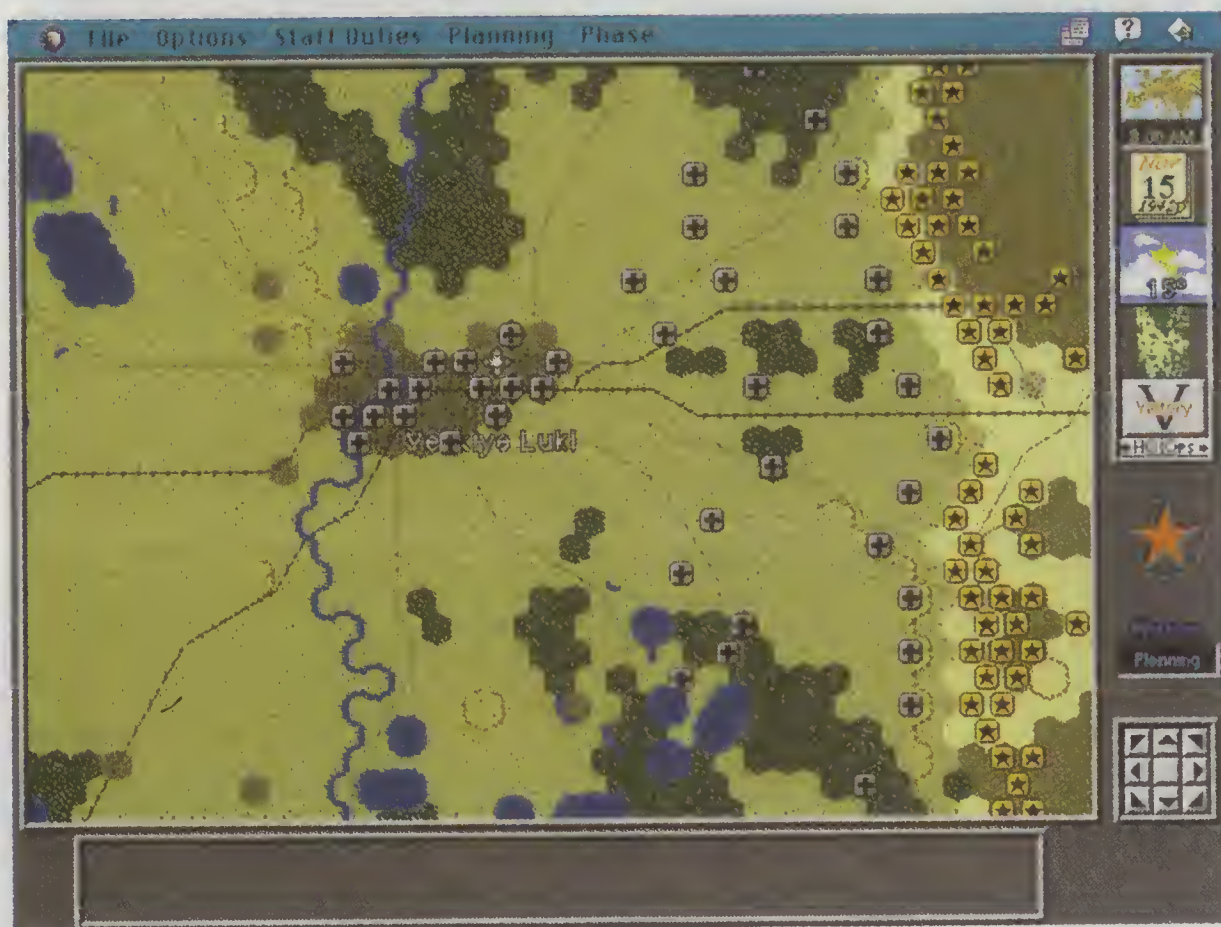
by Peter Syzmonik

The Nominees

Carriers at War
High Command
V for Victory

The Winner

V for Victory



1 1992 was a great year for computer wargames. Just as some were ready to nail the coffin shut on the computer wargame industry, computer wargames made a strong comeback and regained a notable share of the computer game market. Even more encouraging is the fact that many new wargame releases are planned for 1993.

Looking back over the past year, the sheer number of computer wargames released was impressive. A look at PC Research's best-seller lists for 1992 shows that computer wargaming is gaining wide-spread favor. Simulations and wargames consistently made best-seller lists while software publisher's released more add-on game scenarios and than for any other type of computer game.

A number of factors drove the renewed interest in computer wargames, the most being that game publishers all but abandoned the classic but now dated, SSI approach to computer wargame design. 1992 gave us new wargames like **Patton Strikes Back!** and **V for Victory** which introduced us to innovative and, in the case of the former, radical computer

wargame designs. Gone are the days when computer wargames were merely glorified spreadsheets in disguise. The new breed of computer wargame now uses personal computer technology to its fullest potential: powerful artificial intelligence routines, detailed screen displays, and interfaces which allow gamers to learn the mechanics of computer wargames in a matter of minutes rather than hours.

The three nominees selected for this year's Computer Wargame of the Year all represent significant advances in the area of computer wargame design. These are: **V for Victory** by Three-Sixty, **Carriers at War** by SSG, and **High Command** by Colorado Creations.

High Command is a port of a board wargame to the computer screen. The game fills an important niche in the wargame market as a strategic level game covering Europe in the Second World War. The graphics are functional EGA and can be a tad slow at times but like **V for Victory**, **High Command** succeeds in bringing the feel of a board wargame to the computer screen. A VGA version with modem play, sound support, and other standard computer game features should be available in future revisions of the game. **High Command** earns praise for successfully breaking ground in strategic-level computer wargame design.

Carriers at War deserves a spot on the podium for being the best naval simulation released in 1992. The game features detailed and informative VGA graphic screens, a very capable computer opponent that always seems to know a player's weak spot, and a great mouse-only interface that makes the game a joy to play. This game wins a slot for its ease of play and detail that doesn't drown the simulation underneath all the fancy graphics and animation.

As enjoyable as the two previous wargames are, the clear winner of this year's Computer Wargame of the Year is **V for Victory** by Three-Sixty Pacific. The game's maps are so well designed, and so lavishly detailed, that Three-Sixty is able to relate the look and feel of a board game map even though restricted to a relatively tiny computer screen (SVGA graphics go a long way here.) Included with the game are a fine set of charts and tables and an impressive 156 page Reference Manual, along with a 30 page Operations Book loaded with game scenarios and campaign histories.

As our editor noted in a recent issue of this magazine, a real change has taken place in the computer gaming industry. Game designers are now being hired by game publishers solely to design games. This means that the programmers can concentrate on what they do best - programming elaborate game code to bring these designs to life on the computer screen. **V for Victory** clearly shows that this division of labor pays off, and we reward this effort by naming it the Computer Wargame of the Year for 1992. □



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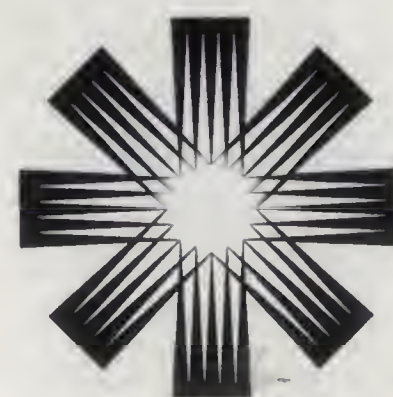
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The Best of 1992 . . .

Adventure

by Theo Clarke

The Nominees

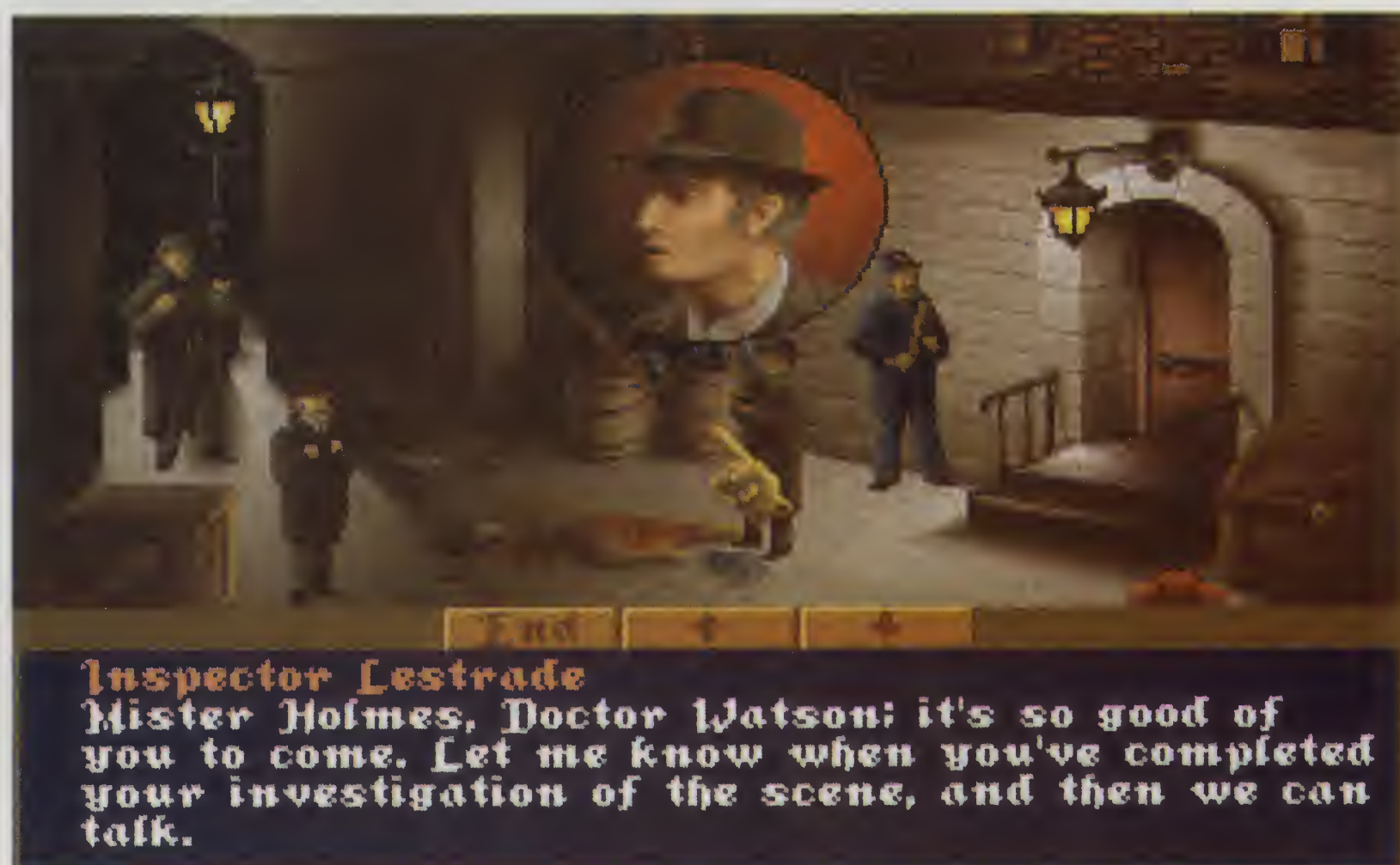
Dark Seed

The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes

Lure of the Temptress

The Winner

The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes



1 992 was the year of the memory monsters. Hardly a month seemed to pass without another game demanding that I clean up even more space on my hard disk to accommodate all its files. Activision's **Leather Goddesses of Phobos 2: Gas Pump Girls Meet the Pulsating Inconvenience From Planet X!** needed 15MB of free disk space yet did not seem to make best use of this. I had high expectations of this Infocom sequel but it was too simple and left me unsatisfied.

This made me wary of the promise of Electronic Arts' **The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes**. This vast game occupied 28MB but provided a wide range of well-animated London locations and a few scenes including digitised speech. My wariness probably increased the positive impression that I formed of this giant.

Sierra On-line can always be counted on to provide a few solid adventure games that push back new technical frontiers. This year, however, seemed to be a period of exploring new

platforms and new markets rather than extending the scope of disk-based adventures. We saw conversions to CD-ROM for PCs and Sega. We saw games aimed at the educational, as opposed to entertainment, market. We saw new editions of old games and yet more sequels to well-established series. For the first time since 1987 Sierra On-line is not on my shortlist. It is not that the quality of their games has diminished; simply that other publishers were continuing to extend the limits of disk-based games. **King's Quest VI** is an enjoyable package but it did not feel as innovative or rewarding as some of the competition.

Darkseed from Cyberdreams was remarkable for its use of H R Giger's artwork and digitised live action that blended seamlessly with his menacing visions. The strength of this game lies in its atmosphere, but my pleasure was diminished by the use of a master diskette as the security device. Clumsy copyright protection like this is intrusive and sufficiently irritating that even a great game suffers when subjected to such archaic treatment. The diskette issue may have clouded my enjoyment but the game remains a fine example of the current state of the adventure game genre.

The Best Adventure Game of 1992 was obvious as soon as **The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes** arrived in beta-test form. This game wins for the sophistication of its controls and the sheer scale of the game. It is not simply that there are many locations and many characters. The point is that all of these elements combine to form a satisfying whole.

'**Sherlock**' only narrowly beat the far simpler but immensely enjoyable **Lure of the Temptress**, developed by Revolution Software. '**Lure**' was barely 10% of the size of the huge Electronic Arts offering but it was one of the few adventures of 1992 that completely captured my imagination. As a reviewer, I rarely keep games on my hard disk after the review has been submitted. **Lure** was a remarkable exception to this. The publishers would have us believe that the game's strength derives from their 'virtual theatre' concept. This is just hype; the heart of the game's appeal is its wit, the distinctive personalities of the characters, and the sheer fun it generates. □

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The Best of 1992 . . .

Role Playing

by Joan McKeown

The Nominees

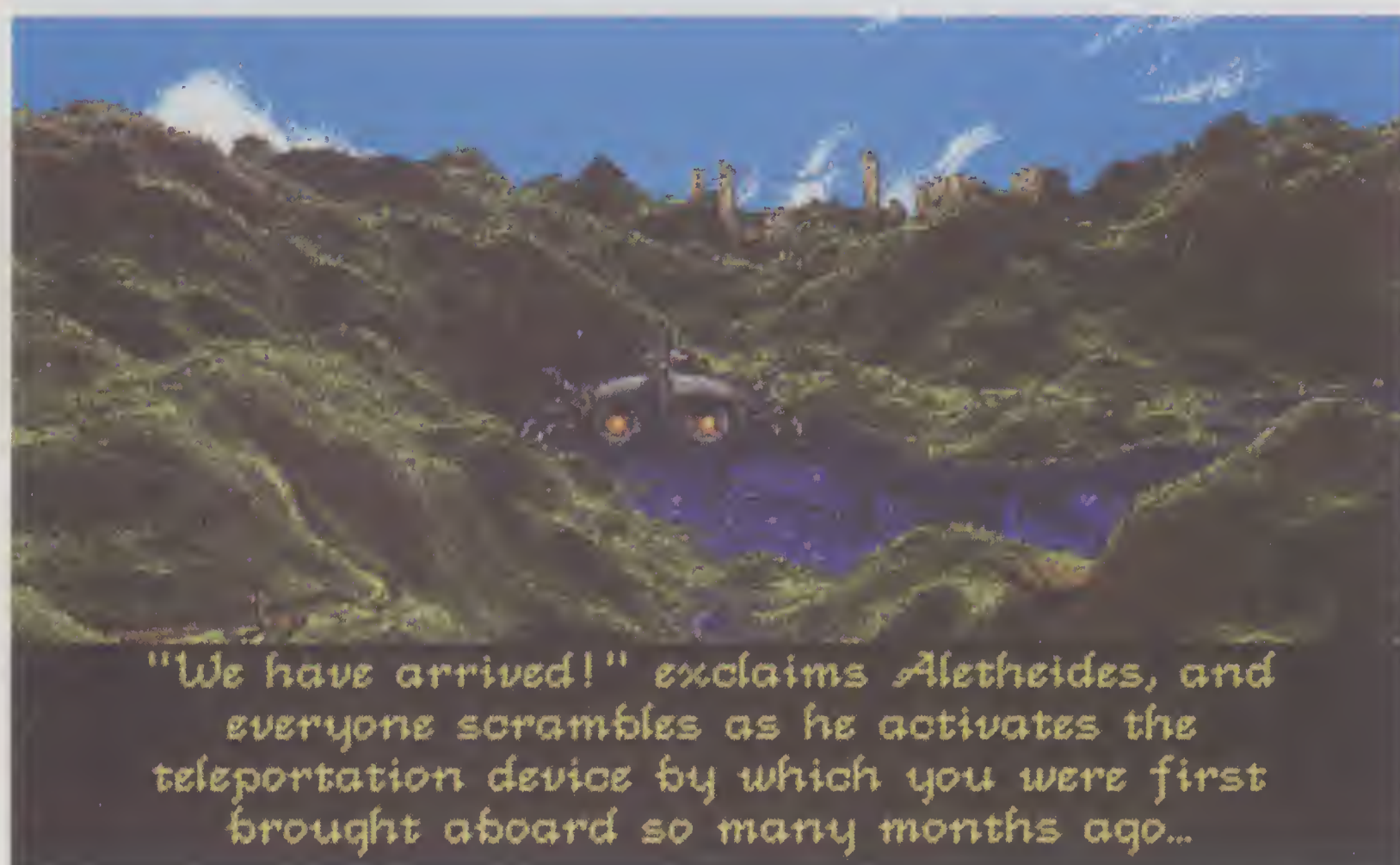
Planet's Edge

Underworld

Wizardry 7: Crusaders of the Dark Savant

The Winner

Wizardry 7: Crusaders of the Dark Savant



This has been a peculiar year in the game world, very peculiar. Two of the most innovative and spellbinding games ever have been released in playable form, **Crusaders of the Dark Savant** and **Ultima Underworld**. One equally innovative but only partially playable effort, **Darklands**, is being released in what appears to be 1 meg segments of updated code.

Both Origin and New World Computing came up with a new twist on an old racket, leftovers *en brochette*, really sticking it to the consumer. Both companies have released major half-games this year, **Ultima 7: The Black Gate** and **Clouds of Xeen** (aka **Might and Magic IV**), and are now marketing the rest of the games under the guise of additional worlds or other dimensions of the gameworld. Origin has also had the nerve to issue **The Forge of Virtue** as an add-on disk for **Ultima 7** and mention that it will also update the game. Big deal, dudes!

New World Computing is calling the second half of the

fourth **Might and Magic** series, **Clouds of Xeen**, the fifth **Might and Magic: Darkside of Xeen**. The two together make, according to New World Computing, one seamless world - read that one game in two boxes. I have no doubt that this is the case since none of the towns in **Xeen** have a dungeon level, and there are entrances to places in **Xeen** that are only accessible if I buy the "**Darkside**." With all its buglets and unadvertised features, **Might and Magic III** was a marvelous game. **Clouds of Xeen** is a pale imitation waiting for the **Darkside** to add some color.

Which leads me to the flub of the year, **Magic Candle II: The Four and Forty**. The **Magic Candle** was a fantastic game for its time, but when Mindcraft decided to release **The Magic Candle II** without mouse support and with bugs, all the anticipation and warmth that should have greeted the game dried up. The interface looked aged and gameplay was slow and confusing without a mouse to navigate the menus. Few players got past the first town and castle.

Within three months of the release, a mouse version was available for the VGA version of **Magic Candle II**, and updates to kill the bugs had also been released, but this was too little too late.

There were many good games released in the past year, and I put **Planet's Edge** from New World Computing, at the top of my list of good games. The complexity of play and the depth of the story permutations gave **Planet's Edge** the edge in playability and general good fun too.

Enough about the good...on to the great! **Ultima Underworld** is a truly spectacular achievement for any genre, but has brought RPG to new heights...make that depths...of technological wonder. **Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss** from Origin took my breath away. What a feeling... Dashing down the halls, spinning around, swashing and buckling and hacking and slashing, and all the while able to chit chat with the locals and maintain a lovely set of maps. Only one scenario could compete with a trip to this abyss...getting stranded in a luxury hotel with a case of icy cold champagne, chilled glasses, and a hot crew of chippendale dancers. Leer. Pass me a grape.

As grand an experience as that provided by **Ultima Underworld** could hardly be topped by anything short of the best game ever: **Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant** from Sir-Tech has topped everything out there, including **Underworld**. **Crusaders of the Dark Savant** is an artistic and technological tour de force. David W Bradley has created a world with a living history, a group of NPCs that are run by a fascinatingly complex AI routine, and a geography and bestiary to die for. The complexity of the story and the variety of characters in **Crusaders** rival the begats, making it a worthy winner in any year. □

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The Best of 1992 . . .

Sports

by Joseph McCullough

The Nominees:

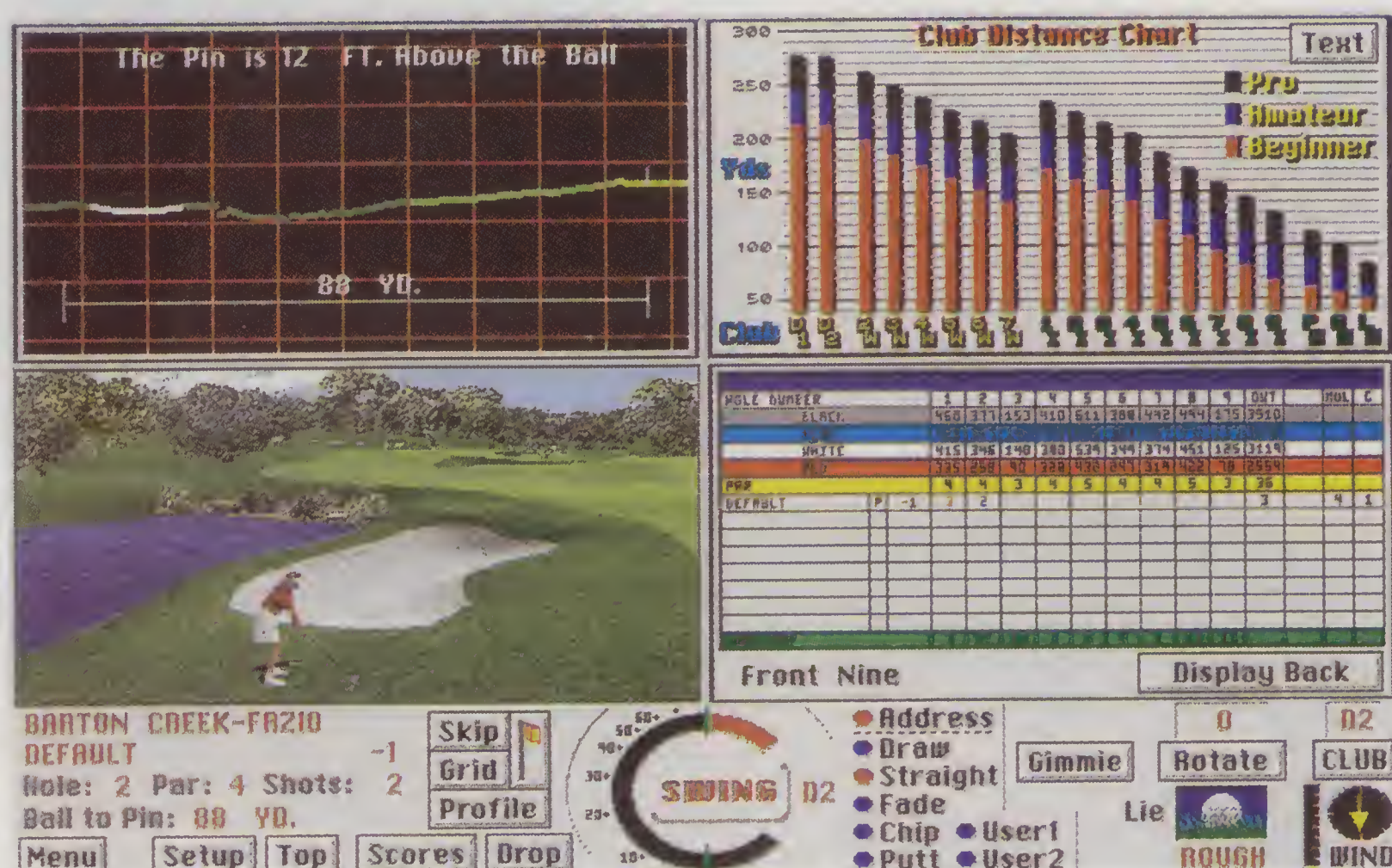
Hardball III

Links 386 Pro

Wayne Gretzky III

The Winner

Links 386 Pro



1 1992 will be remembered as the year of the golf simulation, so it's not surprising that a golf game wins top honors as not only the sports game of the year. Besting contenders as popular as **Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition**, **Microsoft Golf**, and **PGA Tour Golf for Windows**, **Links 386 Pro** dazzled the game-buying public with unprecedented realism. The game's super-VGA graphics, unprecedented in a DOS-based game, blew away the competition by rendering the golf experience in stunning detail. Throw in realistic sound effects, game customization, limited modem-play, and a choice of both male and female personas, and **Links 386 Pro** stands alone. At this moment Access is converting their entire Links course catalogue to super VGA. That should give fans of this remarkable game even more thrills in 1993.

One of the contenders for the title was also an established game that underwent remarkable improvements in 1992. Bethesda Softworks' **Wayne Gretzky Hockey III** proved that the fastest game in sports could be translated to the computer screen and still retain the excitement of the real thing. Players with the requisite hardware were greeted with a new $\frac{3}{4}$ view of the rink that greatly improved the game's realism over its predecessor. No longer were the skaters reduced to small blobs of color whizzing around the rink, as was the case in previous versions of this game. Three-quarter view provided the player with the ability to control on-screen characters that actually resembled humans! This small detail improved the game immeasurably. Fights were now up-close and personal. Skaters slammed into the glass with authority. The guts and glory of pro hockey was never captured like this before.

In addition to the improved graphics, **WGH3** also included play-by-play commentary, multiple play options, stats tracking, and an interface with Bethesda's **Hockey League Simulator**. Few other games in 1992 provided such a complete package of action, realism, stats, and excitement as **WGH3**. This game is a keeper.

Another revolutionary game earned a place on this year's podium — **Al Michaels Announces Hardball III** by Accolade. This game pushed the technology envelope by providing accurate, engrossing play-by-play commentary by one the game's greatest voices. And I'm not talking lame Nintendo-like, one-second, scratchy-sounding, out-of-context, annoying-as-a-hyperactive-yap-dog sound bites. **Hardball III** provided clear, detailed, context-sensitive comments before each batter, during each play, after each inning, and when returning to the game from a help menu.

Oh, and the game was fun to play, too. It included all the de facto ingredients which make today's baseball simulations enjoyable: stats tracking, player and team editing, custom schedules, multiple play options, etc. The only thing missing was modem play; which brings us to our honourable mention for 1992. Despite there being an easy winner, 1992 was an excellent year all round for sports games. □



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Reader Service No. 81

FOR THE IBM PC

The Best of 1992...

Flight Sims

by **Commander Crunch**

The Nominees:

Aces of the Pacific

Comanche: Maximum Overkill

Gunship 2000 Scenario Disk

The Winner

Comanche: Maximum Overkill



After all the work done in 1991 to produce new flight simulation designs, there were surprisingly few such simulations in 1992. Actually, only one of my top three choices is entirely new technology; the other two are in one way or another revisions of already existent designs. Either the industry has decided that last year's designs have enough legs to continue to be worth designing extensions for - in the way of mission disks and scenarios - or we're on the verge of another spate of releases. In any event, enough with the speculation and on with the nominations.

My top three sims for the year are **Aces of the Pacific**; **Gunship 2000 - Ice and Islands**; and **Comanche: Maximum Overkill**. Each of these has come as a surprise in a number of ways. 'Aces' was an unpleasant surprise at first, at least in terms of some bugs and, most importantly, a viciously slow frame rate that had fans watching open-mouthed in shock. Fortunately, Dynamix pulled a rabbit out of their hat months after the initial release, with the result that the **Aces** now lives up to expectations. What makes **Aces** worth a nomination is that, despite its recapitulation of the essentials of Dynamix flight simulation engine, a massive amount of work has been done to in-

clude a wide range of World War II fighter planes from both sides. This is one of the most interesting era of simulated air combat, as the performance of the planes was just at the edge where human skill and daring constituted the main difference in combat performance. The prop planes have enough energy to do interesting maneuvers, but not so much power and advanced weaponry that dogfighting becomes a question of chasing dots.

Gunship 2000 - Ice and Islands is also worthy of a nomination, despite being an add-on disk because it begins to provide the kind of tactical and strategic variety to the original **Gunship 2000** that the design deserves, and provides an excellent and easy-to-use mission builder as part of the package.

It was no mean feat for MPS Labs to put together the urban, islands and Antarctic worlds; each new terrain provides for a thoroughly different kind of tactical conceptualization from the ones present in the original design. 'Ice and Islands' starts to incorporate the kind of thing **Harpoon** fans have been interested in for a long time - anti-shipping and anti-sub capabilities. With **Ice and Islands** and **Gunship 2000** stalwarts are guaranteed many more months of fun, particularly since the mission builder is of the type that allows the player to build missions with enough randomness and surprise to remain interesting.

Finally, we come to Novalogic's **Comanche: Maximum Overkill**. While some have complained about the arcade-ish aspects of this futuristic helicopter simulation, or about the brevity of the 22-mission set that comes with the original design it simply must be said that this simulation represents a quantum leap in air combat graphics and control technology that shouldn't be missed.

The three-dimensional terrain is radically more realistic than that present in previous flight sims, and the dual-joystick control of the helicopter provides the means to use that realistic terrain for defensive cover, while flitting and hovering from location to location. Along with all this, the artificial intelligence running the opponent forces is bright enough to provide believable maneuvers for both land and air units, both prior to the player's arrival and when under assault.

The control of **Comanche: Maximum Overkill** may in some ways be too simple for the more ardent, self-proclaimed experts in the genre, but for those who've been put off by simulations so complex they feel more like work than play, 'Comanche' strikes the perfect balance between challenge and the sheer pleasure of flying, and thus proves persistently inviting to the less goal-oriented among us.

My choice of Flight simulation of the Year, then, goes to **Comanche**, because it's broken new ground, because it provides the chance to broaden the audience for this genre of software entertainment, and finally, because it comes closest in a number of ways to the dream of virtual realism. We can only hope its limitations in terms of tactical scope will be more than overcome by future plans for the design. □

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Actual screen photos from the IBM VGA version.

Reader Service No. 10

Game of the Year

by Brian Walker

The Nominees

Civilization

Comanche: Maximum Overkill

Links 386 Pro

The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes

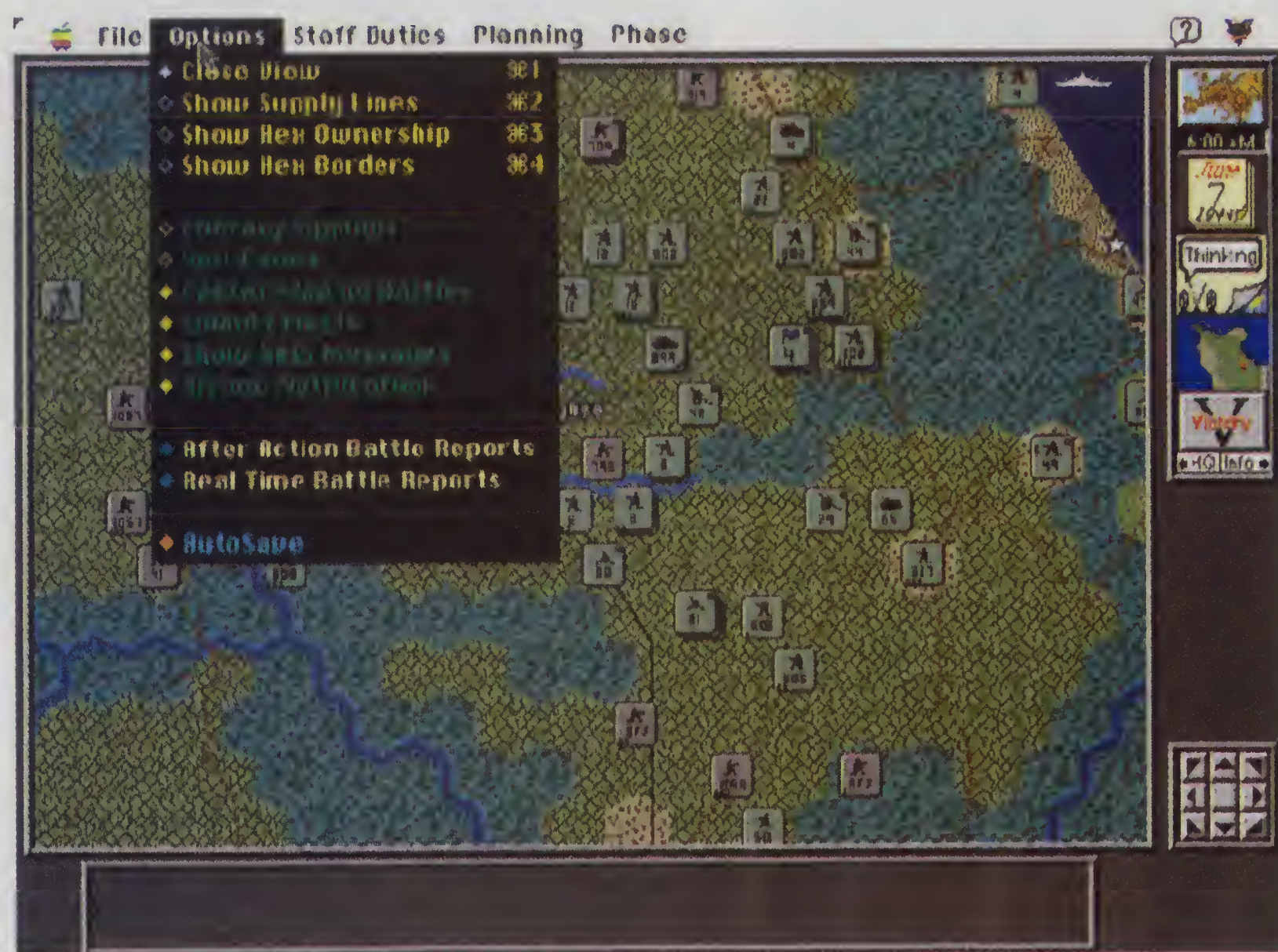
Nemesis V 5.0

V for Victory

Wizardry 7: Crusaders of the Dark Savant

The Winner

V for Victory



As the Chinese might say, it has been 'The Year of the Bug.' Nevertheless there were *some* games released in 1992 in which all the features were fully documented, so let us give credit where it is due. The games listed above are a credit to their publishers, and give credence to the claim that their pursuit of the \$ is equalled by the pursuit of excellence.

Civilization was a stunning achievement by Sid Meier and has already garnered more awards than all the Oscar winners combined. Part wargame, part philosophy lesson, the only criticism which can be levelled is that it was almost overwhelming in scope.

When Joseph McCullough started writing his sports games

column one of his first beefs was how this genre seemed to be trailing when it came to VGA graphics and digitized sound. Not any more. **Links 386 Pro** came along and blew the competition clean off the fairway with 'seeing is believing' graphics. This is now one of the games to beat in any category.

The Adventure Game of the Year award that went to '**Sherlock**' is, like any other such award, open to debate. What is indisputable, however, is that it is the biggest game of the year, taking up a massive 28 megabytes of hard disk real estate. The space has been well used. Evocative graphics, digitized sound, and challenging puzzles make this, at least, EA's Game of the Year.

If the titles listed so far have been monumental in terms of human endeavour, then **Nemesis V 5.0** is in good company. The aforementioned endeavour in this case belonging to Bruce Wilcox of Toyogo, the Hawaii based company (which must make the toil a little easier, I suppose). Many companies talk of the 'man hours' put into their games. In Wilcox's case, the use of the singular is entirely appropriate. Like many games designers his effort is not expended simply to make a buck, but rather for his love of a particular game.

Another of the thought-to-be-extinct species known as the 'lone wolf' is not only alive and well but flourishing. David W Bradley is the name and **Wizardry** is his game. **Wizardry 6: Bane of the Cosmic Forge** was last year's winner, and this year's follow-up is another outstanding achievement. More so because, as Judith Weller points out elsewhere in this issue, it arrived bug free. A notable accomplishment in a genre stricken by plague.

And so to the winner. Not so much the Game of the Year, but the Series of the Year. **V for Victory** has achieved what many computer wargames have been trying to do for years: successfully convert a board wargame onto computer. Many have tried, few have succeeded. But so what, you might say? Shouldn't the power of computers be used for something a little more original than converting an old cardboard map and a few counters into software? Two years ago I would have answered 'yes' to this question, but only because most such conversions were hitherto so inept. Only a radical rethink, it seemed, would be likely to produce the goods. This analysis actually proved correct when **Harpoon** (also from Three Sixty) was released.

It seems almost wilful for the same company to publish **V for Victory** ('Look, we can do it this way, too!'). But publish it they did and by doing so immediately set a standard for others to follow. Superb map graphics which are equal to the board games which inspired them (formerly the biggest complaint of grognards), an excellent interface, a wide range of scenarios, and consistent consumer support from the publisher. Let's not forget, either, the guys who did the real work on this. Hat's off then to Keith Zabalouai and his development team at Atomic Games.

There's a certain irony in a magazine specialising in all that is new awarding this accolade to what is, essentially, a celebration of the past. Old, new, does it really matter? Not really. **V for Victory** would be a worthy winner in any year. □

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Paladin II

It's your party

By Joseph Boone



When I played the original **Paladin** (from Omnitrend) on an Amiga, I thought it was an interesting game. It was a bit limited in many respects but the inclusion of a scenario creator alone made it worth checking out. Few RPG's offer the opportunity to create our own adventures, so it is always appreciated when one does.

When **Paladin II** was released I was curious to see if the design of the original had been improved upon, and

also if the scenario creator had been retained.

As it turns out, there are few changes from the original game other than the addition of 20 new scenarios. Fortunately, the scenario utility is still with us.

Party Skills

Paladin II has a straightforward concept: the player controls a paladin in search of adventure. A menu offers a choice of 20 different missions to embark upon. These missions can involve the rescue of a prisoner from a castle, killing a group of evil-doers, or retrieving an important object. There are some simple puzzles to solve but the primary challenge is provided by combat. There are evil wizards, trolls, and dragons all trying to kill the would-be hero. A party with various skills will come along to help. The composition of the party changes with each mission to ensure that the skills most needed to complete that scenario are present.

Unfortunately, there is a sense of

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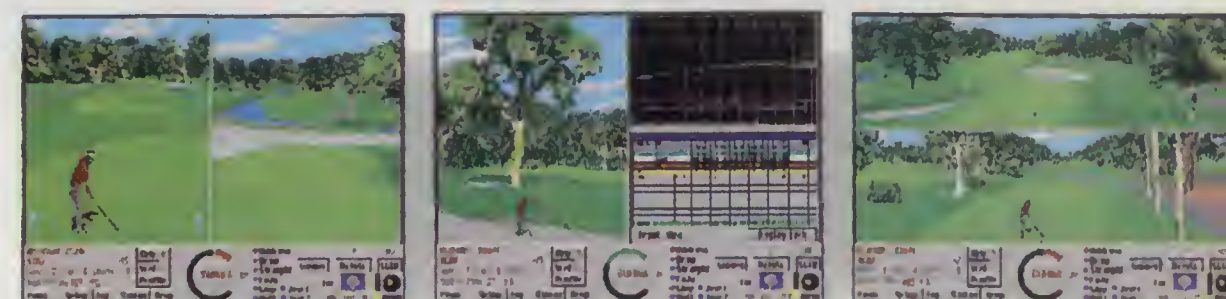
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*Actual Links 386 Pro Super VGA Screens

sameness that seems to creep in after playing several missions. While the missions become more difficult they are limited in scope, similar themes run through many of them.

Likewise, the battle tactics that are needed to succeed are largely developed in the first few missions and only minor tinkering to allow for the terrain and situation is needed in future efforts.

Design-a-quest

The result for me was a sense of boredom that increased with each mission. This is exacerbated by the rigid segmentation of each mission. Instead of a continuing story that unfolds and draws us in, we are given a series of separate short stories that begin and end with no real connection to what came before them or what is to follow. Playing **Paladin II** is essentially like playing 20 short games with the same design rather than playing one epic game.

The one feature that really sets **Paladin II** apart from the crowd is the Quest

Builder. This allows each player to design adventures with all of the elements included in those provided by the developer. Build terrain, place monsters, set the victory conditions, chain two quests together to provide a mega-challenge, and so forth.

While the **Paladin** system may not be the most flexible ever, it is still nice to get free rein to the full extent that the game engine allows. Best of all, the builder is easy to use so it doesn't take three months of studying the manual before successfully completing the first design.

Satisfying fun

Those interested in creating their own games would do well to give this a try. No one is going to create the next **Wizardry**, but it can be satisfying and fun to generate a challenging quest and watch a friend enjoy it.

In fairness to **Paladin II**, it is appropriate to point out a few things at this point. One is that I played the original

Paladin for some time before getting tired of it. I am now looking at a game virtually identical to one I had already grown weary of.

However, anyone who has not played the first game might well expect to get more enjoyment out of it than I, just as I had a good time for a while with my first **Paladin** experience.

Rabid

Those players who loved the original and wanted more will doubtless be thrilled to see the core of the game intact, while a few areas have even been enhanced.

I would recommend **Paladin II** to the following groups: rabid fans of **Paladin**; devoted hack and slash gamers who don't mind the lack of a story, or character development, and anyone interested in designing their own dungeons.

Paladin II may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it can provide a good time to those interested in what it has to offer. □

Designed by
Chris Bamford,
Thomas Carbone

Published by
Impressions

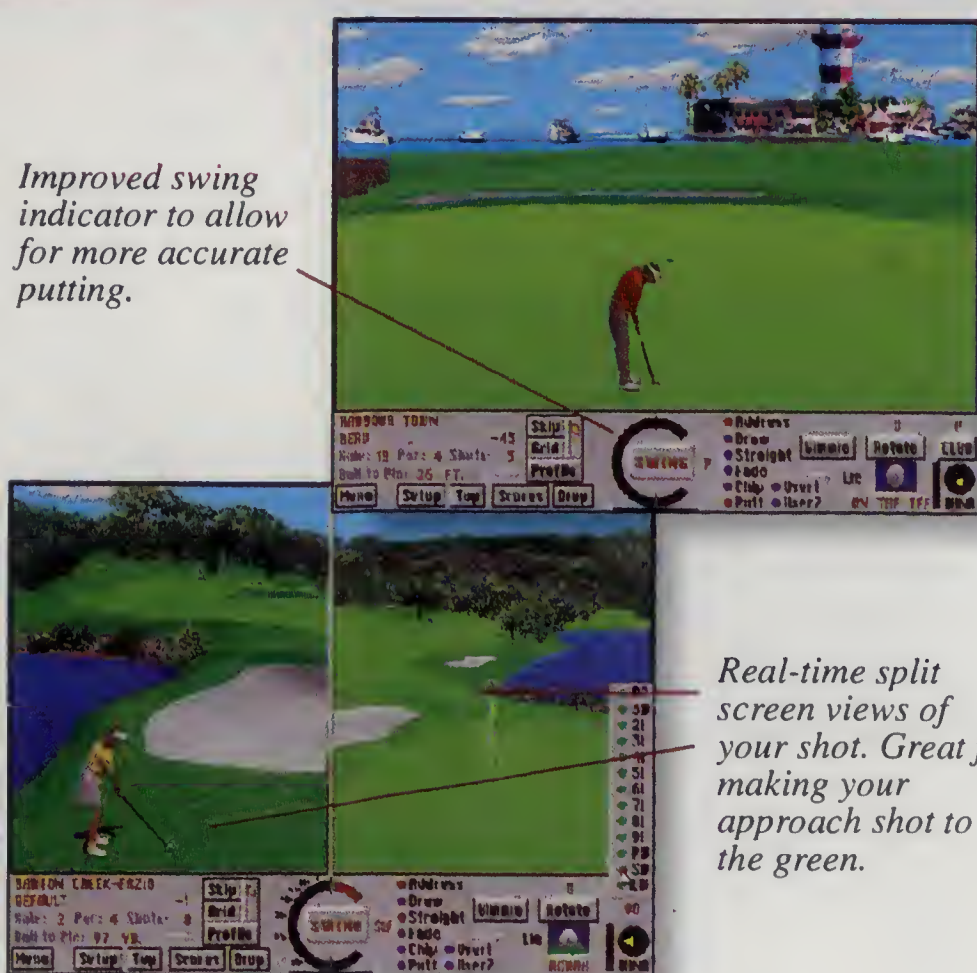
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PC, Amiga

Graphics
VGA

Sound
AdLib, Soundblaster

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Waxworks

On the camp pain trail

By Joan McKeown



There are two very important things missing from **Waxworks**... Elvira's.... Without them, the ladies have little to complain about, the gents have little to interest them, and we have a game without passion. **Waxworks** by Accolade sports the same interface as **Elvira: Mistress of the Dark** and **Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus**, but lacks the spice of the first two games. This may be due to the absence of the camp queen, or it may be that the game design has become overblown and plodding. Instead of the ever tantalizing tips from Elvira, the player is treated to the wisdom of dear departed Uncle Boris, a rather preachy and far less attractive interloper in the gameworld.

Fleshing out

Waxworks is a series of set pieces, wax museum displays that can be entered

and played through. Each exhibit is a stand-alone game segment, set at a different time in history. No matter how well a character does in solving one exhibit, the next one is begun as a level 1 character with no skills, no weapons and nary a clue as to how to proceed.

I died violently

The game contains five sections, four of which are open for exploration at the beginning of the game. I stepped into each of the four available exhibits to see the scenery and check out the story. In each one I died, violently, immediately. There may be a thousand ways to leave your lover, but **Waxworks** appears to have ten thousand ways to kill a player, none of which are very loveable. Death is ugly and brutal every time. And familiar. So much so that one could make a case that these are left-over graphics

from the **Jaws of Cerberus** with a few new game frames added to flesh out a semi-story.

Despite my negative feelings to **Waxworks**, it does contain some good points. The graphics are beautiful, if gory, and the sound quality is excellent. The music is annoying but the sound effects are good. The interface is a standard point, click, drag, drop routine. Nothing new and not very exciting, but it works well within the game's demands.

Sphinxed

Each scenario has plenty of combat and several logic puzzles. The largest segment of the game is the first exhibit, the Pyramid, which has several levels and which must be mapped very carefully. Mapping is tedious but essential since several items from the upper levels are needed to solve sections of problems on the lower levels. Traversing already explored corridors is quite hazardous unless the one is willing to move as slowly. This is due to the fact that the entire pyramid is booby trapped with wires that are practically invisible. I found this little 'gotcha' to be the most annoying aspect of the game.

The character's inventory can become immense. In the pyramid sequence, items can not be dropped once they are added to the inventory. Since there is no apparent limit to the size of the inventory, this is not a major problem, but presents the player with a huge number of items to sort through when faced with a puzzle.

For those in need

The logic puzzles are fair and the tips available from Uncle's Head are quite straightforward and helpful in most cases, but far too circumspect in others. Combat is identical to that in **Elvira I**, much easier than the style required in the sequel.

Two dead giveaways haunt the entire game. Items that are required for puzzle solutions suddenly acquire extra menu options, and just before combat there is a chugging disk access that gives the player lots of time to ready a weapon. These two quirks take what little challenge the game had and reduce it to non-existent.

Waxworks is, perhaps, perfect for those times between great games when any game will do to ease the craving. □

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Published by
Accolade

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PC

Graphics
VGA

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All major sound
boards, mouse

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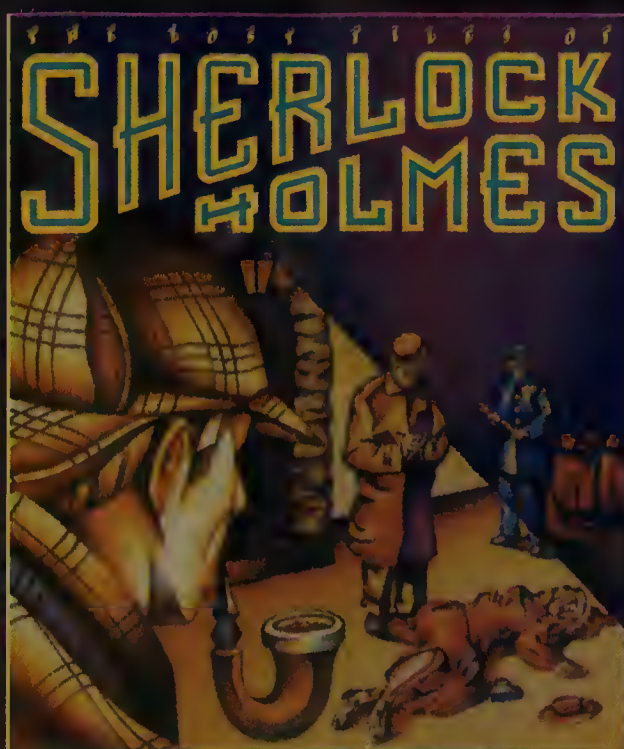
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Toyshops everywhere seem to stock bumper compendiums of games – the sort that come complete with Ludo, tiddlywinks, snakes and ladders and draughts. It's the sort of cheap cheerful present you'd give to a child at Christmas in the hope that a scattergun approach to entertainment will avoid boredom.

Computer games sometimes follow the same line, taking a piecemeal approach that involves presenting lots of little sub games that attempt to make up a complete entertainment package. Such games are usually naff, and **The Koshan Conspiracy** (TKC) is no exception.

Arivederci Roma

Nominally an adventure game, **TKC** also contains versions of Chinese chequers, breakout, a pipeline flow game, two driving and two flight simulators, all of which squat menacingly in a 15Mb gift box. As the adventure graphics are quite detailed, and high quality digitized sound is used, that clearly doesn't leave much room for any of the simulators to be much good.

The player is an agent (as in the original **BAT**) of the Bureau of Astral Troubleshooters, a secret organization based on Earth. There is a rudimentary and simple character generation system that in essence involves picking a profile (such as smart or observant, or strong but thick) and modifying it to enhance what the agent is really good at, or to make some of his faults at least bearable. Attributes are rated from 0 to 100, with 100 good, but beyond that their significance is lost on me.

Arriving at Roma II, a metropolis on the planet of Shedishan, armed with absolutely nothing, the agent has to make his way to the Mantoue Manor Hotel. There he will meet his contact, Sylvia Hadford, who will brief him on the mission. The game's reference card has a walkthrough that tells the player how to guide the agent to his rendezvous. Without this card a player can spend several sessions just trying to find his way around Roma II without any money and therefore no ability to do anything. I know, because that's all I could do with a pre-release copy that lacked this vital element!

Pump up the volume

Graphics are attractive and handled cleverly. A succession of frames appear, each showing a scene the agent has just



visited and making the adventure look like the page from a comic. Background sound is quite good, as befits a game that makes use of digitized sounds, but was a tad quiet, necessitating a vicious cranking up of the volume on my Adlib sound card.

The interface is all point and click: directional arrows appear to indicate where the agent can move too; wobbly lips appear over passers-by to indicate they have something to say. Unfortunately, passers-by seem to interfere with the movement system: it's easy to click on the mouse to move, only to find the agent initiating a

conversation.

Talking is handled quite simply by pointing at topics, clicking, and letting the other party gabble on. The system intelligently notes new topics the agent can talk about once he learns of them. Any notes about their significance, however, have to be jotted down on paper, as there seems to be no way of accessing topics other than through conversation.

Many of the screens are too cluttered to make much sense. For example, the signs used to differentiate hotels, pharmacists, armourers and the like. Finding out

BAT 2

The Koshan Conspiracy

By Ian Marsh

Published by
Ubisoft/Computer's
Dream

Designed by
Herve Lange

Systems
PC

PC graphics
VGA

Supports
Keyboard, mouse,
joystick Adlib,
Soundblaster

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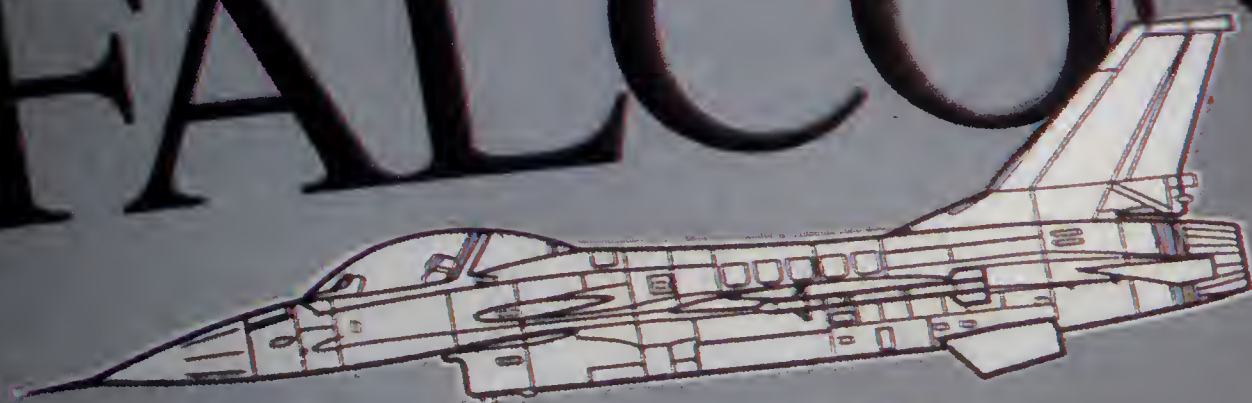
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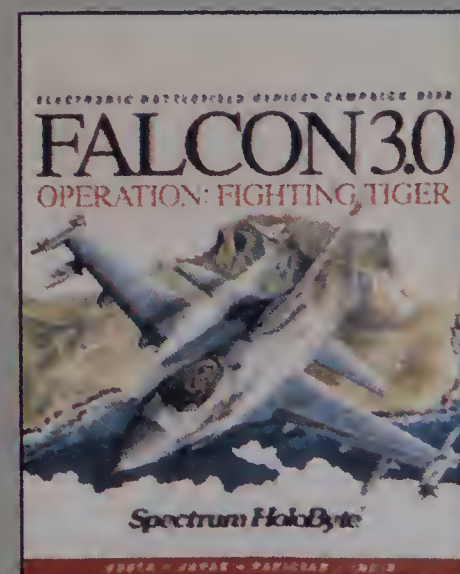
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where the agent is depends very much on wandering in to a shop and talking to the assistant.

Shop talk

Movement between areas of the city depends largely on the VIA (a sort of taxi) and the Mosquito (an aerial taxi), both of which must be hired and come in self-drive or paid driver options. They eat up money quickly, especially the paid driver option which avoids the tedium of having to use the simulators. Two simulators, however, are compulsory, which is a bit of a bind for players who like adventure games but hate driving and flight programmes. Why do programmers insist on putting in these elements?

Combat can be in two forms: strategy based or arcade based, which respectively seem to add the equivalents of shove ha'penny and a shooting gallery to the compendium. As well as the compendium there are three adventure games. The first is a simple mission to find out who has the holding interests in the echiatone mineral deposits on the planet and to secure them. The implication of the game is that this will require quite a bit of money: much more than the agent carries on his debit card. Perhaps this is why the gambling games are included, so that once the player becomes good at them it is possible to play for high stakes and therefore win enough to accomplish his mission.

Alarm shock

Throughout his adventure, the agent is hampered by a bidirectional organic biocomputer (BOB) that is built into his left arm. The manual explains it is a tool

that can help the agent and even save his life, but basically it is a confusing extra. It allows the player to write programmes in icon form so that an alarm sounds if, say, the agent is feeling hungry or someone he is dealing with is hostile. In essence, it's fine if the player is a computer programmer, but for dunces like me who just use computers as a working tool and a games machine it is useless. The programming system is pretty unworkable: instead of a tablet of icons, it is necessary to click through a list one by one until the required icon is found. Messy.

As well as the programming function, there are also icons that in essence appear to be a medical analysis kit that shows heartbeat and how various bodily functions are performing. Drugs can be injected into the agent's body to compensate for lack of sleep, injuries, low-light, and there are even little cosmetic sacks to disguise his features. One drug also will give the agent premonitions of danger. It's all very fitting for a science fiction setting that verges on cyberpunk.

Trivial pursuits

The game employs a hierarchical object management system, which I have to say is a jolly good idea, but unfortunately it is badly executed. A game such as **Ultima Underworld** shows how it should be done – using pictures. **TKO** uses a four-way arrow system based around the agent's body as the trunk of an object tree. To find out more about objects, the object has to be selected and moved to the appropriate icon and then replace: compare that with a simple click on an interrogation icon and then on the object itself, and the creakiness of this mechanism become clear.



The real nail in the coffin for the game is the section in the manual entitled 'Bat II in stats.' Trivial statistics about the effort put into designing it, the number of sandwiches eaten while doing so, how many times a particular key combination was pressed, how many innocent virgins were slaughtered and so on, are clearly a warning to any prospective player that **TKO** is a turkey. Admittedly it's trussed, stuffed and complete with bread sauce and cranberry jelly, but it's a turkey none the less. □

Spelljammer

Pirates of Realmspace

By Joseph Boone



Spelljammer, the RPG from SSI, is an ambitious project. Space flight simulation, planetary exploration, ship to ship combat, and tactical personal combat are all attempted in varying degrees. The game is based on TSR's **AD&D** series in general and the **Forgotten Realms** world in particular. The TSR **Spelljammer** supplements form a rich and enjoyable gaming environment and the potential for enjoyable computer gaming based on this material is vast.

Jam session

The game begins with the player character taking over as captain of his very own spacefaring vessel. Faced with an entire solar system to explore there is little choice but to select a planet at random and go there. Navigation is handled using a series of menu choices which lead to star charts where a location is selected. Once the course is chosen the captain

simply activates the icon to begin spelljamming and awaaaay we go!

For those who have envisioned the wonders of space and the majesty of the stars, the visual representations are likely to be disappointing. While the graphics for this segment might be considered exceptional on a Commodore 64, it seems unlikely that anyone accustomed to quality VGA pictures will be impressed. Basically, we are shown what looks like a black background with moving sticks that are supposed to be celestial objects rushing past.

Brave new world

Travelling between planets seems to be a fairly lengthy undertaking. There is far too much time spent waiting for an interminable period of time for the ship to arrive at its destination. I can only suppose that we are expected to spend the time marveling at the 'beautiful' graphics.

Upon finally arriving at the chosen goal it is with some disappointment that we see there are very few options available to explore this brave new world. A menu with several locations such as an inn or shipping warehouse is provided. Most of these places offer simple choices such as what to buy or what cargo to take on for shipping. Missions can also be obtained at the inn which will help pay the bills that will inevitably accumulate. Unfortunately, these missions seem to be randomly generated and it is even possible to get the same mission after successfully completing it earlier in the game.

Culture shock

Since these missions are the only thing remotely resembling a plot in the early stage of the game, this haphazard method of selection leads to the feeling that the game is spinning its wheels and the player is accomplishing little if anything. Most disappointing about all the worlds in **Spelljammer** is that none of them has any real personality or culture of its own. There is no sense of visiting exotic new places because all we see are the same old menus and a mediocre shot of a town from that planet. Each and every planet can be summarized in one word. Bland.

One common result of accepting missions and flying through space is engaging in ship to ship combat. Whether commissioned to destroy pirates or the victim of a chance encounter it is a certainty that every captain will be forced to take arms against another ship with some frequency. Weapons can be targeted at various parts of the enemy ship or one can aim directly at the opposing crew. Despite the fact that the ship is navigating in space, movement is limited to two dimensions with no ability to climb or dive. This combat is played out in real time and has a definite arcade feel to it.

While ship to ship combat is probably the best part of **Spelljammer**, it is a relative strength at best. There are few strategic options which leaves the burden of providing excitement squarely on the arcade action. The system is simply not up to the task. The battles last for too long and move too slowly. Most of the time is spent maneuvering for position or allowing weapons to reload. There is nothing remotely compelling about the process.

A common tactic in combat is to grapple an opposing ship and board her. What follows is a battle between the two crews. The system used for this personal

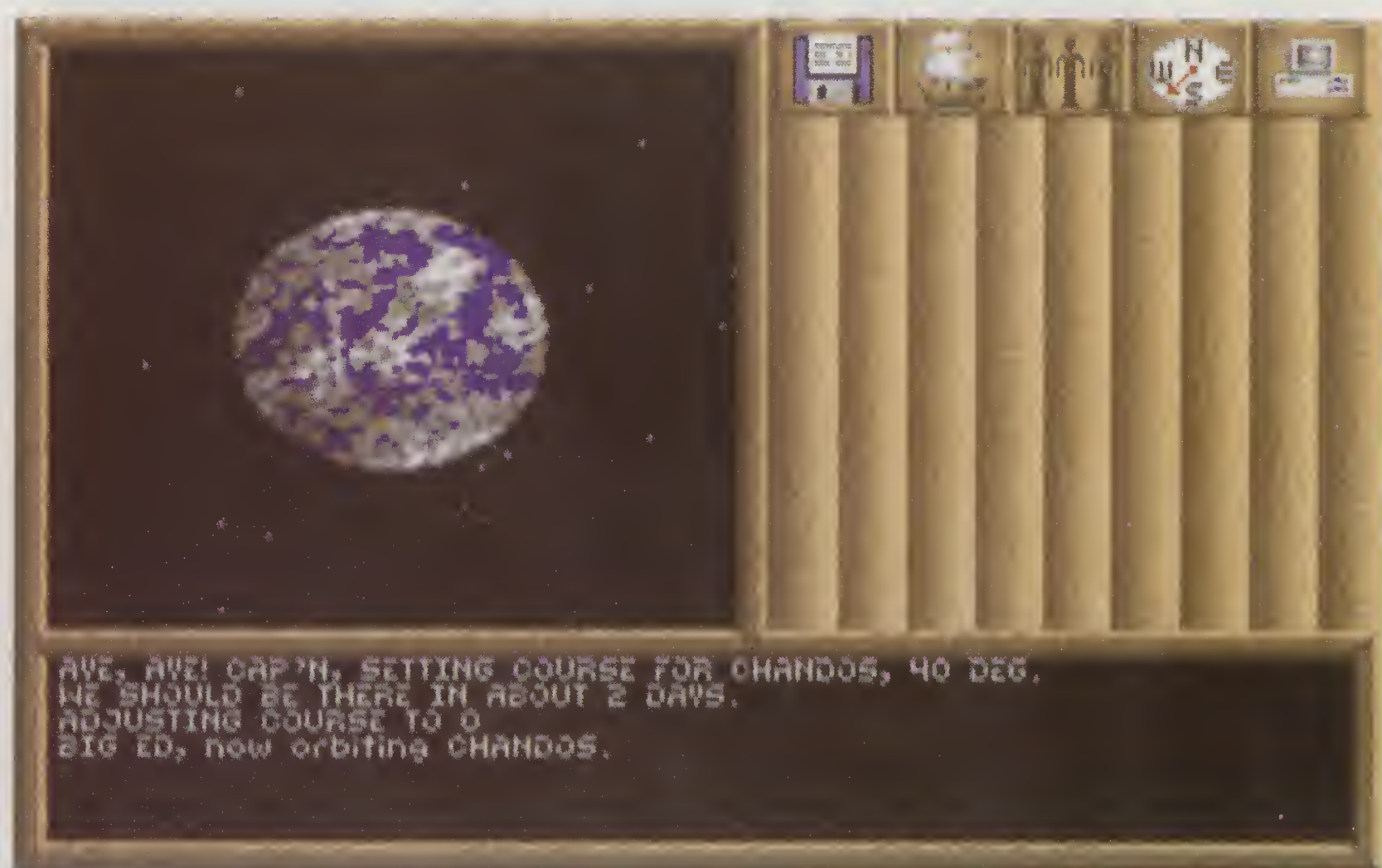
Produced by
George MacDonald

Published by
SSI

Systems
PC

Graphics
256 Color VGA

Supports
Mouse, most
soundcards



combat greatly resembles the tactical combat screens from the SSI Goldbox games. An overhead perspective offers a view of the battleground while a series of icons are available to command the troops. It is unfortunate that the designers chose to devote nearly half the screen to these

command icons, as it severely limits the area the player can view on screen at one time.

Combat is made more difficult as a result since the field of battle tends to be fairly large. The graphic representations of the combatants are also not up to par

with recent SSI releases such as **Pools of Darkness**. One can only wonder why SSI chose a combat system so similar to the Goldbox games, but chose to create a new, inferior, implementation instead of merely placing the existing one into this game.

Odds and sods

I began this review by pointing out that **Spelljammer** is an ambitious project. It is most unfortunate that little if any of this ambition is fulfilled. Each aspect of the game is so jarringly different from every other portion that there is simply no flow or continuity to the process as a whole. What is worse is that no single aspect of the game is particularly enjoyable. We are left with a collection of odd parts, none of which are fun. My last session with **Spelljammer** left me with a thumping headache and an overwhelming lack of desire to ever play it again. With all the quality games coming out this winter there is little reason to waste time and money on such a lackluster product as **Spelljammer**. □

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BIGGER THAN THE BOTH OF US



Andy Backer visits The Kingdom of Drakkar on-line

The Kingdom of Drakkar is MPG-NET's (Multi Player Games Network) rip-snortin', swords and sorcery, interactive, sometimes frustrating, on-line computer-role-playing-game. The objective of a player's character, as in other RPGs, is to choose a profession, explore, have battles and rise through the ranks, acquiring more levels and skills.

The advanced players on-line in **Drakkar** call that getting 'big.' New players (Newbies) often seek and get the help of big players in the game. Some of the really big players have logged thousands of hours of playing time. One player has logged 9,000 hours in the year that **Drakkar** has been on-line!

It's quite easy to meet other players in the game and to ask them for advice and help. All a player has to do is meet

them in the Steel Flower, the on-line pub. There is usually always someone in the pub, or any player in the game can be 'paged' from the pub. After players are paged, they can quit the game and go to a menu where they can choose to enter the pub. Quitting automatically saves their position in the game. Characters also meet each other while exploring and often pass each other in the streets and buildings of the cities where they almost always stop to chat.

Pub crawl

The excellent graphic interface along with a multiplicity of gaming and communication details allow one to escape into this addicting fantasy world easily. The primary interface is a

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Life-like high resolution digitized card graphics add to the realism of the program.

256-color, VGA, mouse-driven interface called Drakvision which is available for IBM, Amiga and Macintosh users and takes up about eight megs of hard disk space. Character and monster icons appear to move across the screen. (The movement is an illusion created by centering the player's character icon in the middle of the screen, and repainting the screen around the icon each time the character is 'moved'.)

There is a five-second delay between giving a series of commands and their enactment in a 'round.' I played the game with a 486/33 and a 386/33 and was comfortable with the speed of Drakvision. There is an ASCII interface available for those who want more speed. Several of the big players do use the ASCII interface for that very reason.

Drak cooler

The documentation that comes with the start-up kit is excellent. It is easy to understand and is full and complete. Even more information is available either through conversations with the players, or by downloading hint files and maps.

Two alternate characters can be setup for each account. It takes only a few minutes to create and roll-up a character, and there is an option available to re-roll as often as wanted in order to give the character better attribute points.

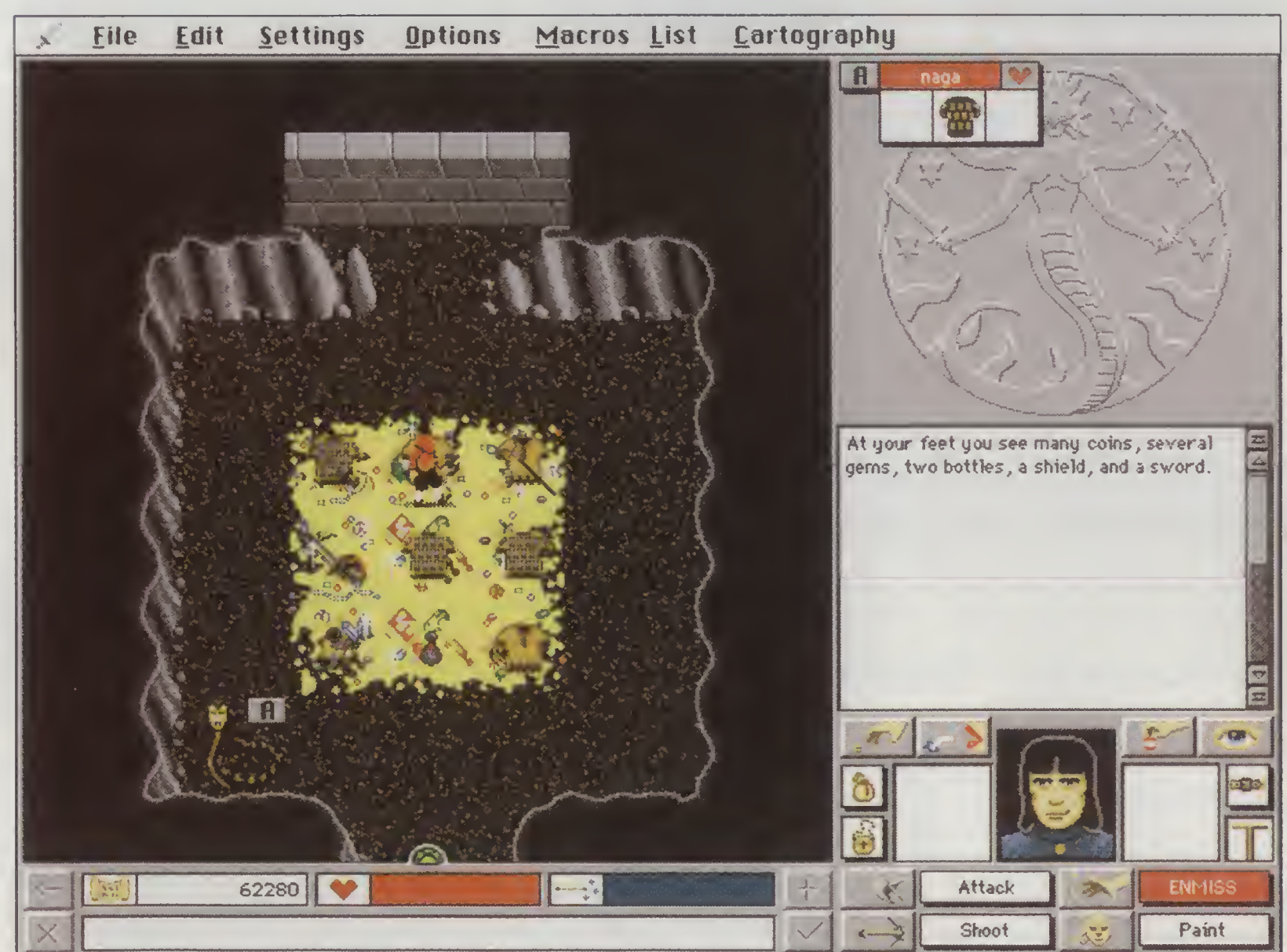
Character race choices are: Outcast, City Dweller, Woodlands Dweller, Forest Dweller, Underground Dweller, and Mountain Dweller. Every character starts as a Merchant and must dedicate themselves to a profession and pay for training before entering combat. Profession choices include: Fighters, Martial Artists, Mentalists, Healers, Barbarians, and Thieves.

Dying in Drakkar is quite frustrating. There is no Boots of Re spell (reboot option) in this game. Resurrected characters lose at least one hitpoint, and depending on the circumstances of the death, they can lose much more. If a Griffin eats the character, the character loses a level of experience. The most common penalty is the loss of a constitution attribute point whenever a character dies and the player elects to restore the character. Handily, there are constitution potions available in the game that can restore those points; but 'con pots' are rare and not easily found.

The living dead

The danger of dying in **Drakkar** gives the game a depth lacking in any other RPG I've ever played. It encourages the players to play in parties, and not be loners. The chances of dying in a party are minimal. Healers constantly cast protection spells and healing spells. Even if a character does die, the party will either resurrect their dead on the spot or take them to a healer.

The dead can help themselves. The haunting voice of the dead can be heard by the party. The live characters can even talk back to the dead if they know how! The dead can bemoan their fate, and give directions to the living to help them find their bodies. Even dying alone and being stripped of all possessions has its positive side. The player learns a lesson, and volunteers will rescue lost equipment when asked. First, the character's body, although stripped naked, does appear safely resurrected back at the feet of a healer in the city. It is minus a constitution point, but the player can go to the pub and tell of the location of the death, and other players will



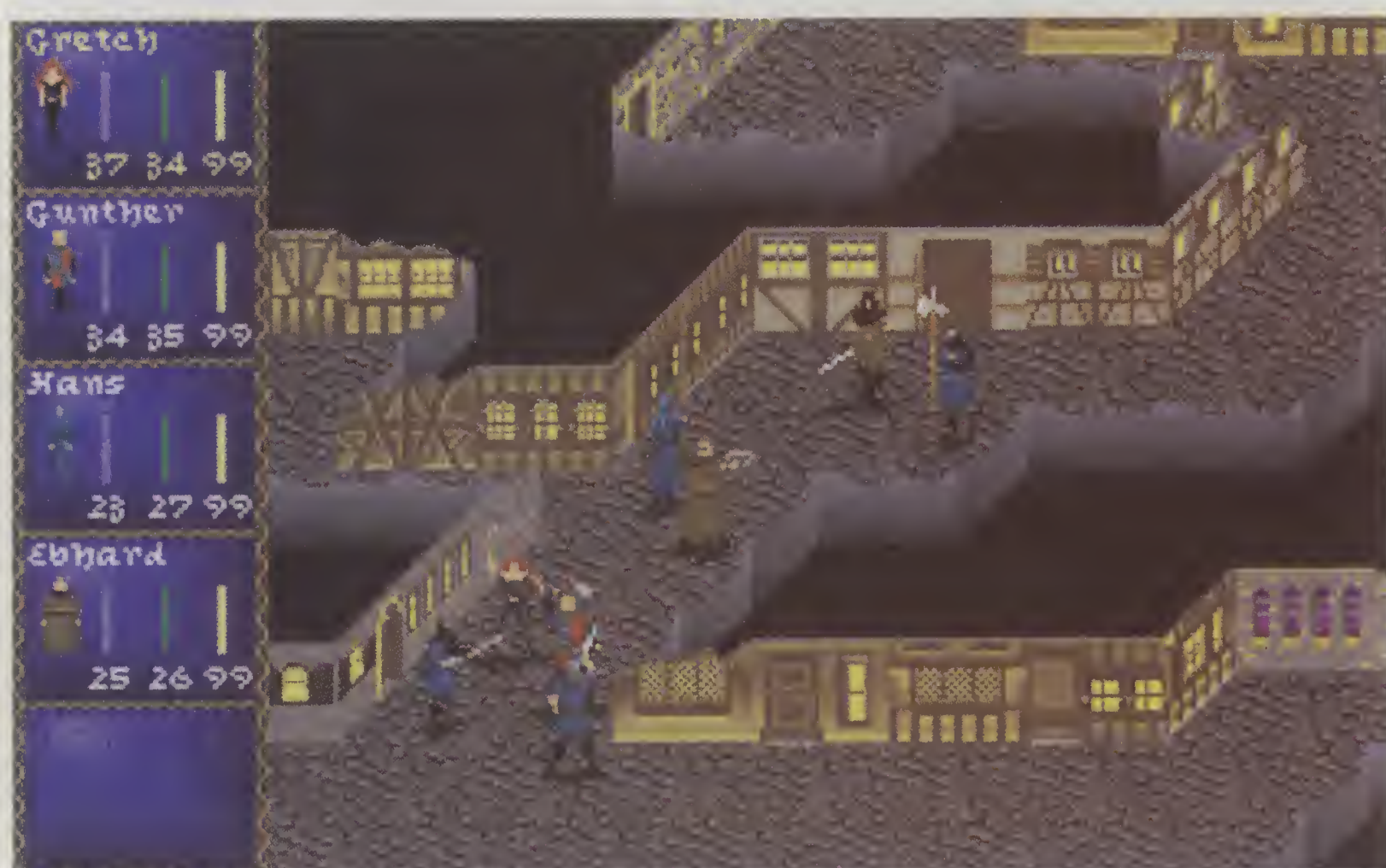
immediately teleport to the vicinity and rescue all equipment lost and return it; and, who knows, maybe someone will even give the player a con pot!

Emotional rescue

Bill Blakemore, a fellow player, told me: 'What really counts in any interactive game is player interaction. Any rating of an interactive game has to consider the quality of the players you interact with, not only as a source of information, but as a source of emotional support.'

Drakkar rates high on player interaction. Bill is only one of the many, high-quality, friendly players that we met in our tour of **Drakkar**. It's a very chummy place, especially, as my partner would like to flirtatiously point out, if you're female! And, of course, it's big. Bigger, in fact, than the both of us. □

BLOCK BUSTERS



Curtis Suddarth
and 'Unca'
continue their
journeys
through
Darklands and
Wizardry 7

Darklands

The next major version update that Microprose will be issuing will be version .07. This promises to fix most known major and minor bugs and improve the overall game. It will also allow save games inside dungeons and castles. If it follows the pattern of the other fixes, it will also contain some additional artwork. This version should be released after Christmas or the beginning of January.

Microprose is currently testing an interim upgrade called version .062. This will not add any features except to fix several minor bugs not addressed with earlier fixes.

For those who are on the verge of giving up and assigning the game to the closet, here are a few workarounds until version 7 is available:

QEMM owners may want to use some other memory manager because of problems concurrently running *SmartDrive*. Also, the *Stealth* feature of *QEMM* can sometimes play havoc when the game accesses certain video memory in use. Removing the *Stealth* parameter may solve the problem.

Loading saves from within the game may produce problems. If this happens, exit the game and load from the main menu after startup. Having at least 630K base memory free can avoid problems. A vanilla boot disk is usually the easiest way to free as much memory as possible.

All things considered, the good points of *Darklands* far outweigh the bad. The depth of play, the world size, and unique material presented will probably make this game a classic for RPG fans once all the bugs are vanquished.

Tips

This month we'll look at the three quests leading to the final confrontation with the demon Baphomet. This doesn't necessarily mean the game is ended, but it is the main thread. The party can continue adventuring around as well as finish several other small quests.

The first quest is to find the witches' High Sabbath. The location and date can usually be found out when the party destroys a village that practices satanic rites. To find out if a village is under satanic influence, go to confession at the local church. The priest will tell a character to perform some strange rituals for absolution if it unholy. Approach the schulz and accuse his village of satanic practices. After the battle, write down the date and location the witches say. If the party is unable to reach the described location in time, another run-in with witches will reveal the new date and location.

When the party has arrived at the correct place, choose the ambush option. This will allow them to acquire cloaks for disguise. They should then proceed in to the main camp. It is always preferable to avoid combat whenever possible, so try to avoid fighting the wolves. Once in the camp, any one of the choices for the party is fine. Volunteer to help fix the meal, and baptize the babies. This gives an increase to virtue, and makes the infants useless to the witches. With the others choices, try to talk the witches into leaving instead of attacking. Slaughtering peasants isn't the primary goal.

The altar site

Another chore the party should volunteer for is to help prepare the altar site. This will allow them to despoil the summoning site. Speaking to the water ritual group and the broom riding group is also a good way to increase virtue. If the party is approached, bluff. When enough time has passed, the group is summoned along with the witches to the altar. Read all the messages carefully, because one will tell where the Templar monastery is located. If it is missed, the party will have to reload and try again.

Allow the demon to be called forth, then challenge it. This will result in a battle. Once the demon is defeated, the witches will attack. After several waves, the party will (hopefully) be victorious. There is no time to rest between waves, so have enough healing potions ready before entering the Sabbath. After the encounters, the party will break the first seal. Once that has been accomplished, the party is ready to travel to the next big battle.

The Templars' castle is in many ways the hardest quest to complete. It can take several hours and there is no way to save the game while in the monastery. This place is big, with a lot to explore. My party each had twelve to fifteen Essence of Grace potions, and they used most of them. A wide assortment of other alchemical preparations can also be highly valuable. The combat encounters range from mild to mildly nasty. I would recommend traveling around a while before tackling this quest so as to build up characters' abilities, especially combat skills.

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Mini-quests

There are several mini-quests while in the monastery:

Upon meeting the mad monk, talk to him about God. When he asks for a confession, attempt one. He will give you an important piece of advice.

Look through the pile of burning books for a book from St. Thomas Aquinas. Actually, a party can keep going back until their best scholar's Speak Latin skill is maximized. (small cheat)

When the party finds the silver paper and ink, copy the symbols.

The only way my party could get information from the guard room was by attacking.

Give the skeleton his bone for some very valuable information.

Look for a secret door to find the head of the order.

The party finds three saintly artifacts. (These were the only ones my characters found.)

The final battle against the demon results in the breaking of another seal. This allows the party the ability to enter the Castle of the Apocalypse.

Castle of the Apocalypse

The Castle of the Apocalypse consists of completing the challenges of six rooms. Successful completion will give the party the six keys to enable the final confrontation with Baphomet. This quest is not the long grueling affair that the Templars was. It is actually fairly mild until the end when there is the fight of fights for the entire game. Everyone should have plenty of healing potions and be fully rested before this one. Knowledge of the following saints would be helpful: St. Polycarp, St. Finbar, St. Apollinarius, and some unknown saint who would help when dealing with Famine. (Sorry, have to find one for yourselves.)

The first room contains a seed. Four demons have to be fought after getting by fire and ice. This is by far the easiest of the keys to get. The second chamber has fire beings who guard a shipwreck. In the shipwreck is a prisoner. When the party frees her, she breaks the fourth, fifth and sixth seals. This allows the party access to the next areas. She also gives the party a fish in a globe.

Next the party will tackle the room to the third key. There are four alchemists, and they are widely separated. The best tactic I found was to have each member of the party throw a Sunburst potion, then attack a different alchemist. When the alchemists start to attack again, throw more Sunbursts. Reaching the center, the party finds a jar of honey. This can be a moderately tough fight because of the potions being thrown and the traps.

The fourth chamber is pitch black. Calling upon St. Finbar allows the party to travel through the maze with a light source. Skeletons will have to be fought periodically, but they are mild. Reaching the center gives the party a magic lantern.

Locust-like critters abound in the fifth chamber. They are not that tough, and defeating them yields two Essence of Grace potions every time. These will definitely come in handy later. Upon reaching a certain room the party will face one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, Famine. This encounter cost my party all their gold to acquire the scales, the fifth key. That unknown saint might have saved a lot of money.

The sixth task contained a huge host of lancers. A pray to Saint Apollinarius calmed the multitude. To get the Sword of War, my group each gave up one quart of blood, becoming permanently weaker in the process. With the final key, the party can pass through the seventh door. This is by far the toughest fight in the game. St. Polycarp should be invoked before entering as well as any potions drunk that help with battle. The way is guarded by a nasty many headed dragon. Only two members of the party can melee with the monster, so the other two should hurl potions and use missile weapons. This fight will likely destroy all armor below a 30 quality, so be prepared to buy new stuff later. The dragon hurls fireballs, and is tough to hit. An abundance of Essence of Grace potions is highly recommended.

Once the dragon is slain, the way is set for the final confrontation with Baphomet. I am going to pass over the specific details here, but the party should have no problems. The ending of the quest is nicely done, and the party will find itself in a nice tavern. The party then has the option of retiring, or continuing play.

Curtis Suddarth



Wizardry 7: Crusaders of the Dark Savant (part two)

We were sipping suds at The Boots of Re when Unca burst through the door, crying, 'Wine and fresh bathrobes for my men! We're all wet! We've been up and down the waterslide at the Funhouse so many times we're all water logged!'

We asked him what he was talking about and Unca sat down with a squish, sighed, and patiently began, 'I'll go back to the beginning. When I talked to you last issue, we had just finished exploring Orkogre, right? I'll just continue the tipthru from there.'

He continued, 'We left Orkogre to investigate Nyctalinth, but were met at the gate and told to immediately see the head T'Rang. We were polite at the meeting (afraid to offend our ominous hosts) and agreed to talk to a T'Rang back in New City. We were allowed to take a teleport back where we met the T'Rang, who asked us to kill an Umpani hunter for him. We agreed, but had secret reservations. He left and we had access to the T'Rang embassy in New City from that point on.

At the temple in New City, Father Rulae talked about Brother Tshober and what to say to him, so we wrote it down and went east to Munkharama. Tshober met us at the river, and after a lengthy conversation (aided by our Rulae notes) helped us to cross the river.

The Polar Club

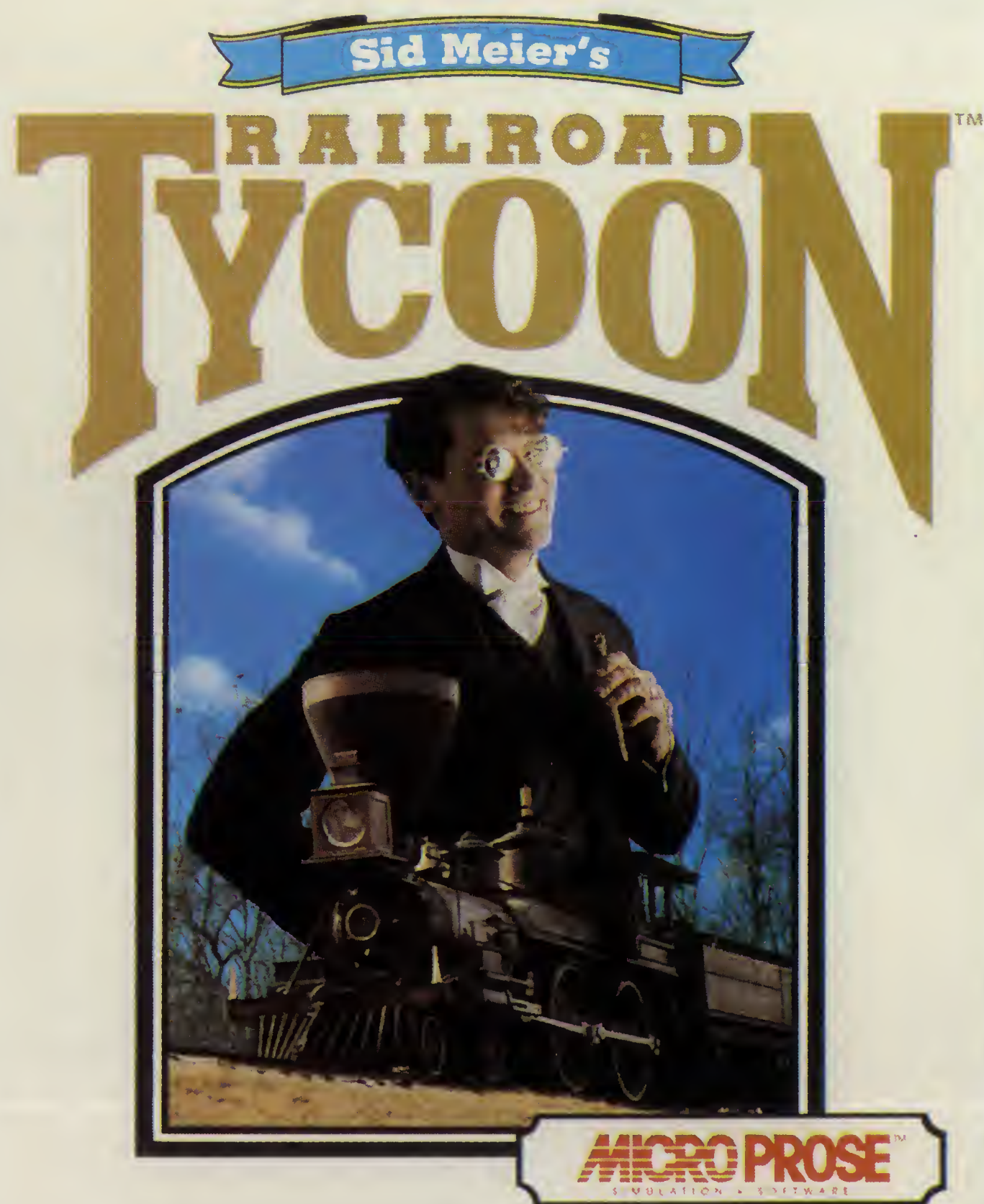
We explored Munkharama. We first solved the riddle of what to shout down the Well by remembering what people used to put on the eyes of the dead. The Well rewarded us by giving us four coins. We put the coins in door slots and found four beans. We put the beans in four chalices and then found a room with a spindle. We spun the spindle. The results were mixed (two black, two white), and we dropped through a trapdoor. We rebooted and went back to where we found the beans. We put them in different chalices. This puzzle was like the game Master Mind. An all black spin opened a door in one of the chalice rooms to The Polar Club.

The Polar Club had a wading pool for beginning swimmers and a pool for advanced swimmers to practice their skills. It also had a rubber bear which Thumbs invoked giving him a few extra points in swimming skills. We found out later that good swimmers can swim directly to the Polar club and do not need to solve the bean puzzle.

Brother Moser's apothecary was down the hall from the Polar club and after we found the door to The Land of Dreams (near one of the Urns), Moser gave us information we used to enter the Land of Dreams (after we had explored the Hidden Temple).

The land of Dreams

When we explored the Land of Dreams we finally ignored the warning to not enter the black door. We found the door after a pipe smoking Munk gave us a pipe and a pouch which we merged. We



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stepped into the void alternating puffing and walking until the pipe finally lit up. We were offered several items, each leading to a different increase in attributes. We chose the Gown (regenerative armor), which increased all of our piety points, but wonder if we made the best possible choice! The strength increasing sword looked interesting.

We were then transported to the secret school of Xhen Xheng. Xheng asked us for the Holy Work that we found in the Hidden Temple and we gave to him. He asked if we wanted to accept a special assignment (to find five flowers and bring them to him), and we said yes. Thumbs finally got dressed in the Ninja garb we found in a treasure chest. (He had been stark naked ever since he changed from Thief to Ninja.) He also got a black belt that reduced his armor class even further.

The temple

We understand that the ?Temple map describes how to find the temple but we got there without a map. We searched the waters around the island and found another set of coins. We put them in the appropriate Urns and then used an object we found at the statue in New City at the Munkharama statue. This dropped us down into the temple.

The temple was large and time consuming. We spent days exploring it before we found a notched stick (?Bo) which we used in a hole in the wall (it looked like a depressed wall button) to turn off a trapdoor. Beyond the trapdoor we found a ladder down into the flooded parts of the temple. Brother Tshober's conversation gave us the clues we needed to find the Holy Work.

A ladder out of the Hidden Temple put us on the road to Ukpvr, but traveling along that road wasn't anything like one of the Bing Crosby and Bob Hope movies. There were many tough battles before we reached Ukpvr.

Ukpvr

The Umpani at Ukpvr are soldiers. We joined the Umpani army. It was the only way to get into the city! They gave us several different missions with different sets of orders. They forced us to buy inferior equipment that we sold -except for a musket that Baka, our Samurai, practiced with at the firing range. It took him a few tries before he found that the musket only worked after he loaded it (merged musket with shot) and equipped himself with it. He put the target on the back wall of the range and stood behind the line to fire. Baka found a new personal skill that he got up to 35 or so, and after he hit three bullseyes we all got promotions to TUF. This allowed us to buy a Blunderbuss which Mama, our Valkryie used. It took two loads at a time instead of the one allowed the Musket; and caused 30 points of damage a hit.

Much of Ukpvr we weren't able to explore until after we got our final set of orders. We were then able to explore all of Ukpvr, including some places where we took careful notes and later opened the Security Vault we found in New City with one of them.

We spent some time exploring the forest to the north of Ukpvr. We climbed some mountains and found some flowers. (Luckily, we had been developing our climbing skills so we were able to climb without falling too many times!)

We got orders to find and destroy a band of T'Rang camped in that forest. The T'Rang asked us to spy on the Umpani. We killed them. If we hadn't, Umpani spies following us would have turned us in as traitors. Even though we killed all the T'Rang we went back to Nyctalinh and talked to the spider behind the window he still assumed we were friends.

The Queen of T'Rang

Our last mission for the Umpani was to kill the Queen of the T'Rang and her brood of eggs at Nyctalinh and the Umpani General who gave us the assignment also gave us a special weapon with which to do it. Before undertaking this assignment we accepted one we got from the T'Rang, to go to Rattkin Ruins and solve the puzzle of the six spears.



Rattkin Ruins was difficult to enter. We finally found a sacred grove of trees near the crossroads between Rattkin Ruins, New City, and Nyctalinh. Rows of trees attacked us without pause. When we finally won, we planted our ?Bonsai tree on the stone slab in the center of the grove. When we got to the ruins and found a face in the trees, help was then available.

Rattkin Ruins was huge, with many ladders up and down. We finally found the Thieves Guild but couldn't get past the hands check until we found Blindmeis. Thumbs practiced his thieving skills on the blind rat as advised by the voice behind the window.

The Funhouse

The proprietor of the Thieves Guild sold us the object we needed to get into the Funhouse when we talked about the place. The Funhouse seemed to be a Rube Goldberg puzzle collection. It took many hours to find and assemble parts of contraptions that eventually got us into previously hidden areas. Some of the contraptions spread out over several levels. We completely assembled one involving a sea saw which when we stepped on one end whipped us four feet up into the air. We flew higher after we used a special item we bought at Bertie's. We found Barlowe, who gave us an assignment and some information about how to access Old City back in New City. (We talked to the Professor at the Library about archives. He gave us a key to the Old City Access which we explored later. There wasn't much of interest there. We understand that if one visits the Magic Emporium in New City at midnight the Dane will sell magic goodies. For some reason the Dane didn't take a liking to us and wouldn't sell us a thing, however.)

The last contraption we found in the Funhouse was the waterslide; and that's from where we just came. We are at present trying to adjust five different levers we found (by going through a trap door with a churning device that looks like a Ferris wheel), so that we go down the slide to an otherwise inaccessible area. We found and placed a wooden dowel and a bar with a rope but have not found the correct combination for the levers yet. We know that two of the levers have to be down and the others up, but enough for now. Next month we'll finish this tipthru about **Crusaders**.

Last months tips

The following are a few of his more important tips from last month:

- The name on the flyer found in the starter dungeon is the password to New City.
- Talk to the Innkeeper to get the phrase that the Arms dealer is looking for.
- Release the prisoner, but not before he talks about what to say to the King of Orkoge.
- Open the door with the bloodstains in Orkoge with a little 'reflection.' □

'Unca'

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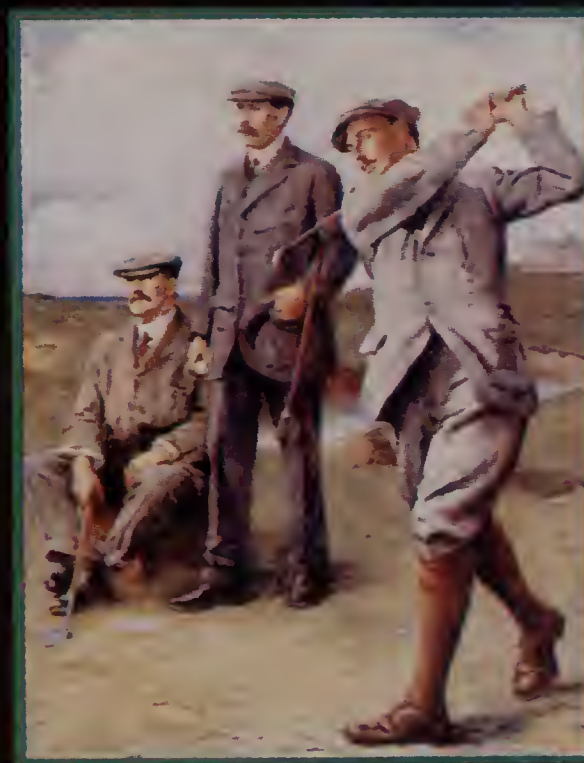
"As far as I'm concerned, you only need to have one golf game on your computer, and Ultimate Challenge Golf is it. Everything I can think of that should be in a computer golf game is in there."

C.P. — Registered User

"Once you play this it is tough to go back to the other type of golf games. Once my friends play it, they show up all hours wanting to play more. It's a fun game to play. You are actually part of the game rather than just tapping the keyboard for a simulated swing."

J.M. — Registered User

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MASTER EDITION

Why Ultimate Challenge Golf Is Different

The Game Of Golf Versus The Look Of Golf

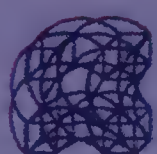
The other major games are primarily graphics programs, simulating the "look" of golf. Ultimate Challenge Golf truly simulates the "game" of golf with tremendous depth and precision, including more course data and more shotmaking options than any other game.

Golf Knowledge Versus Finger Dexterity

The other major games are arcade games. A player's shotmaking skills are defined by his *finger coordination*, tapping keys to hit shots. In Ultimate Challenge Golf shotmaking skill is determinate upon the player's *course management skill* and *golf knowledge*, with no "coordination tests."

True Shots Versus Random Shots

The other major games use a simple shot mechanism which determines each shot based on the player's *random finger coordination*. The Ultimate Challenge Golf shot mechanism took 12 years of intense research and development to fully assemble. It *assimilates thousands of factors* in determining a *true shot* every time. (Just for fun one day we created a finger coordination shot mechanism superior to any other — in just 3 hours.)



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Reader Service No. 91

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Hearing aids

By Jamie Parent

Manufactured by
ATI Technologies Inc

Compatibility
AdLib, Soundblaster

Price
\$129 (may vary from
store to store)

Anyone looking for a sound card that offers more than just aural qualities, keep reading. Stereo F/X, from ATI Technologies, has taken the soundcard concept several steps further to give more bang for the buck. The most significant of these steps is the addition of an 8 watt amplifier that is built right onto the card. And if that isn't enough, there are also two mini speakers included free for a limited time.

Along with the amplifier and speakers, a volume control dial and two 1/8" stereo jacks, one for input (line and microphone) and one for output (line or speaker)

are also included. Since we are talking about a complete sound package, don't forget MIDI control. Stereo F/X sports a 15 pin MIDI in/out/thru that meets all standards in MIDI control. If MIDI holds no interest, then the MIDI port doubles as a joystick port.

Installation is simple. All it requires is the usual task of inserting a board into the computer and loading the software. There are no jumpers to worry about, and the best interrupt and addresses are found by the software automatically. For all the basic functions, from volume control to play and record, simple command line

programs are used.

All these functions are wrapped together by Voyetra Technologies in WinDat for Windows or DosDat for DOS, both of which are included with Stereo F/X. WinDat and DosDat allow the playing and recording of samples; cut and paste pieces of each sample; save and load samples to file; and even filter samples to get the best possible sound. The available samples, ranging from glass breaking to saxophone music, can be added to one's own sound library if so desired.

Another utility provided is the mixer. All the mixer functions are combined into one program allowing the user to listen to input through the sound card. This little feature actually turns the computer into a stereo enabling the connection of a walkman so that tapes or the radio can be listened to while at work. For those with CD ROM devices and the associated drivers, the mixer can be used to listen to CD's. Let us not forget about that which is dear to us all; game playing. Stereo F/X is 100% compatible with both AdLib and SoundBlaster. Those who have yet to play any games with stereo sound are in for a

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These serials were made up of intriguing, fast paced episodes which placed the hero in unbelievable peril. AMAZON contains 14 exciting episodes filled with plot twists, mysterious characters and heart stopping cliff-hangers. You haven't had this much fun since the drive-in days!



Metal monsters seek your destruction!*



treat. Even the sound through the aforementioned mini-speakers is perfectly acceptable and a vast improvement on the usual PC squawk.

Another enhancement to the usual soundcard package is the ability to synchronize sounds to graphics. Stereo F/X provides software to help associate sound samples to certain specified graphics and animations. Simply specify a particular sound to be played whenever a .gif or .fli file (graphic standards) gets loaded. When the animator displays graphics, Stereo F/X kicks in with a blast of sound. This is a great way to spruce up presentations, or bring those demos to life. And for the programmer ATI has provided all the drivers needed to create quality programs.

For every day use as a sound enhancer for games, for creative programming and MIDI control, or as a stereo, one really can't ask for more than this card provides. Stereo F/X has become a much appreciated addition to my computer system. I look forward to 'hearing' more from ATI technologies. □



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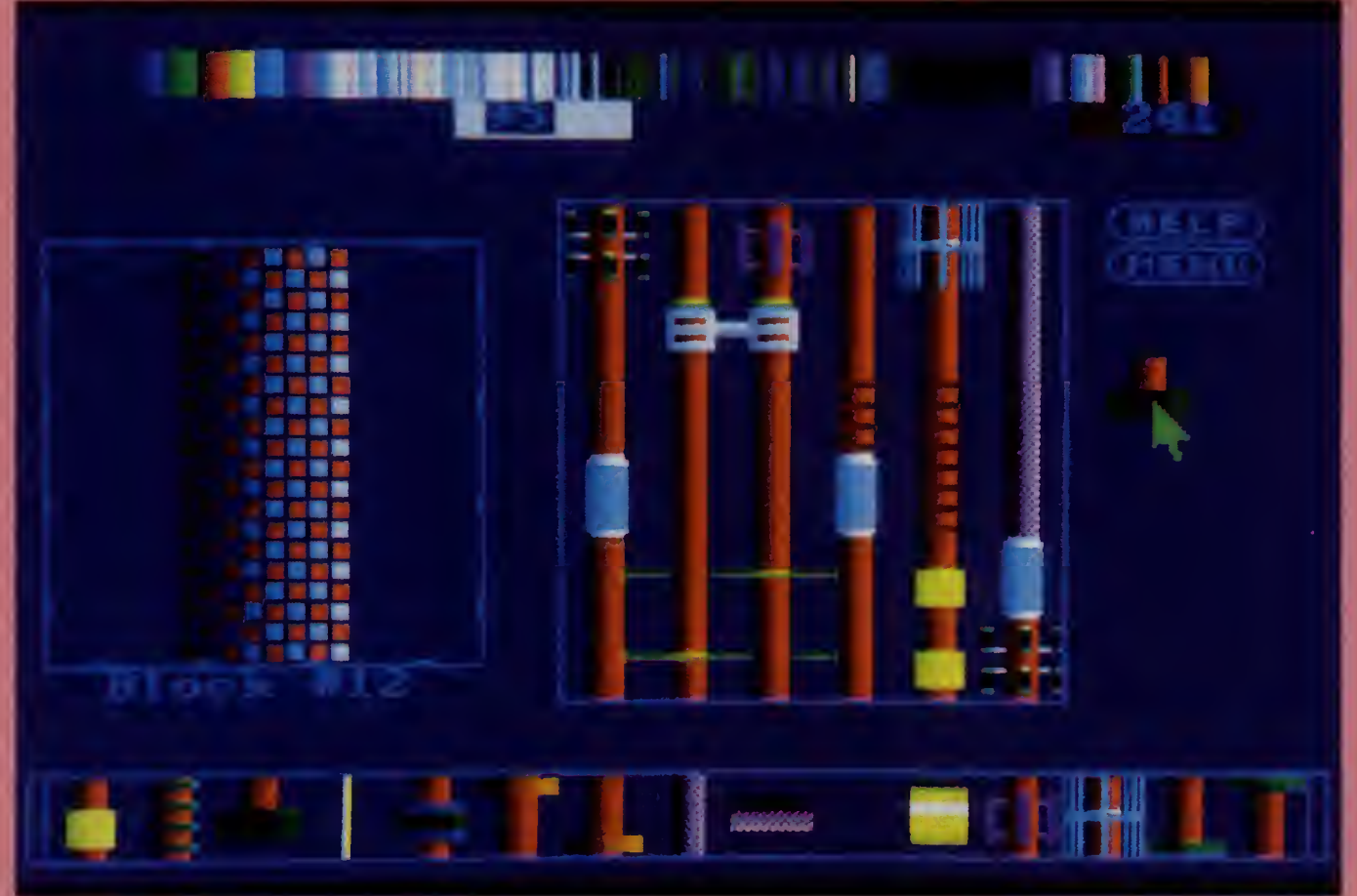
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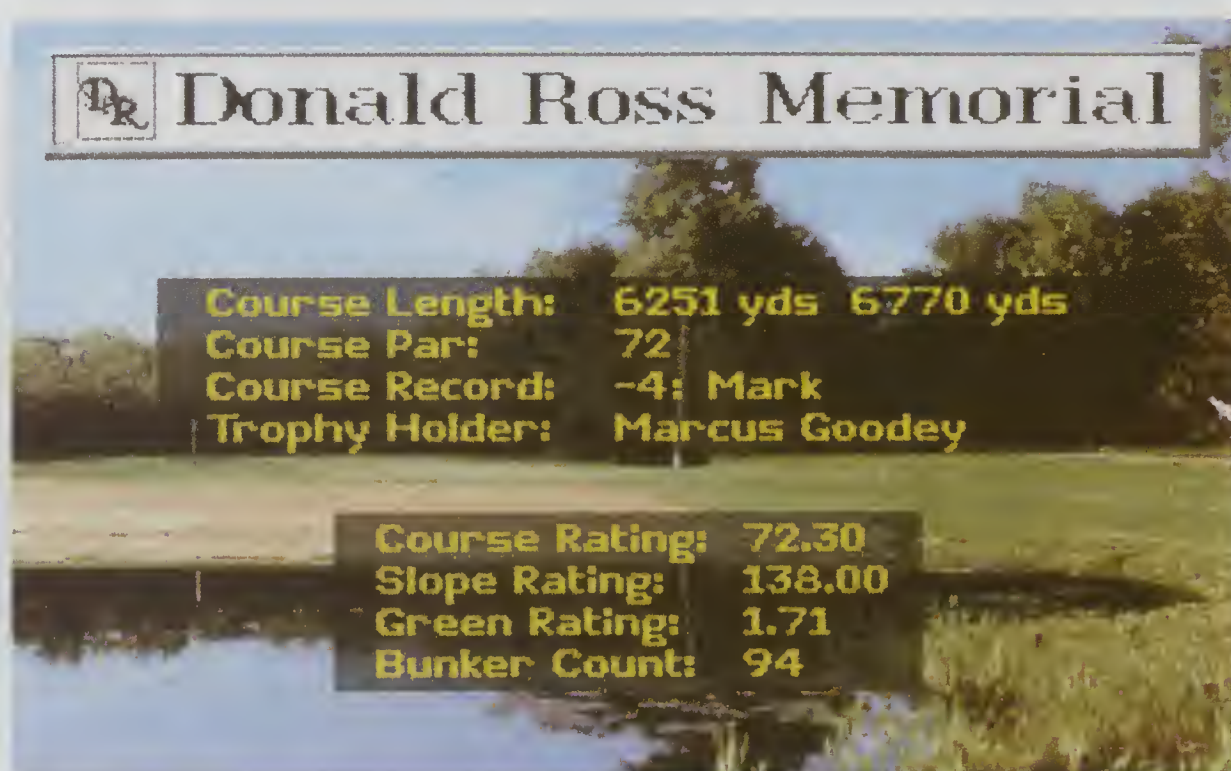
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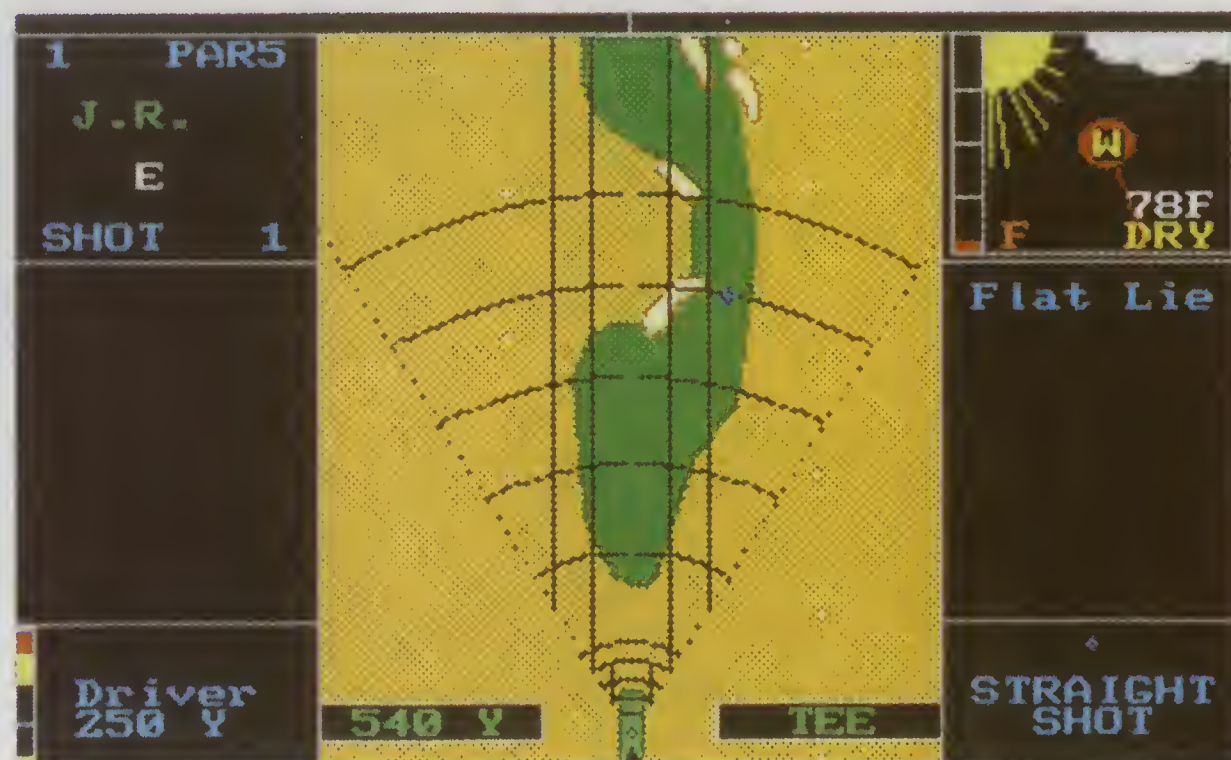
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THE SPORTS LOCKER

Joseph McCullough surveys what stacks up



Greens: a modem first



Ultimate Challenge Golf: impressive gaming engine

It's no secret that game software is getting bigger. Better graphics and sound require larger files. Larger files take up more disk space. Not too long ago the average PC buyer could live comfortably with a 40 meg hard drive. Now some of the more complex games require one third to one half that space.

What's a guy to do? It really isn't cost effective to run out and buy a new hard drive every time a must-have game shows up on the local dealer's shelves. It's also a pain in the posterior to continually remove and re-load games from one's hard drive every month or so. The solution? Stacker from Stac

Electronics. This compresses files on average up to 50 percent, essentially doubling an existing hard drive's capacity. It can then decompress files on the fly, with only a minimal performance hit.

I mention Stacker in particular because it has been the most popular of this genre of utility programs. It beat the competition in comparisons tests run by *PC Magazine* in early '92, and at roughly \$100 (street price for software-only version) is an inexpensive way to wring new life out of an old drive.

With such a popular product on the market, one would think that game publishers would be smart enough to make sure their games are compatible with the Stacker device drivers. Unfortunately, this is not the case. One new game in particular, **David Leadbetter's Greens** by Microprose, is not compatible with Stacker. That's too bad, because 'Greens' looks like an otherwise stunning game.

From what I could glean from the manual and the few screens I saw before it went belly-up on my PC, **Greens** takes a different perspective than the other golf simulations on the market. It approaches the game as a golf tutorial, with renowned golf instructor David Leadbetter's tips sprinkled throughout game play.

Greens also features quite an arsenal of top-notch features never before combined in one golf game. It has the most play modes of any game on the market, including modem play; advanced shot set-up; multiple courses; and great graphics and sound. Too bad it won't run on a Stacker disk partition. The folks' at Microprose say there is a work-around for this (installing the game on an un-stacked partition), but I couldn't get this to work either.

Ultimate Challenge Golf

Speaking of innovative golf simulations, the guys at Friendly Software have produced what I believe may be the first and only strategy golf simulation. **Ultimate Challenge Golf** doesn't rely on the player's dexterity to determine shot outcomes. Instead, players must take into account multiple strategic factors when planning their shots. These factors include wind direction, weather conditions, ball lie, club selection, obstacles in the path of the ball, and player characteristics.

The latter is definitely a first. When setting up the game, the player must create a profile for his alter ego. What are his strengths and weaknesses? Is he a better long-ball hitter, or more accurate. What about woods vs. irons? And putting, how good is he in this crucial part of the game. These parameters and more define how your player will perform on the course. There is, of course, the option to define a player with no weaknesses, but according to the manual, computer players with tournament-level abilities will not necessarily succeed unless their human controller has superior course management skills.

Ultimate Challenge Golf has quite an impressive gaming engine. Nothing was left out statistically. Course handicaps are even re-calculated after a suitable number of rounds has been played. Unfortunately, the graphics are only EGA, and there is no support for any sound cards. The sound I could live without, but the bulky EGA graphics get in the way of accurate course management.

Still, this game is quite an interesting concept, and should appeal to die-hard duffers who are frustrated by the vast majority of golf games that rely mostly on dexterity to determine shot outcomes. □

David Leadbetter's
Greens

Designed by
The Thought Train

Published by
Microprose

Systems
PC, Amiga

Graphics
VGA/MCGA,

Supports
Mouse, All major sound
cards, modem play

Players
1-4

Ultimate Golf
Challenge

Published by
Friendly Software

Systems
PC

Graphics
EGA

Players
1-2

Notes:

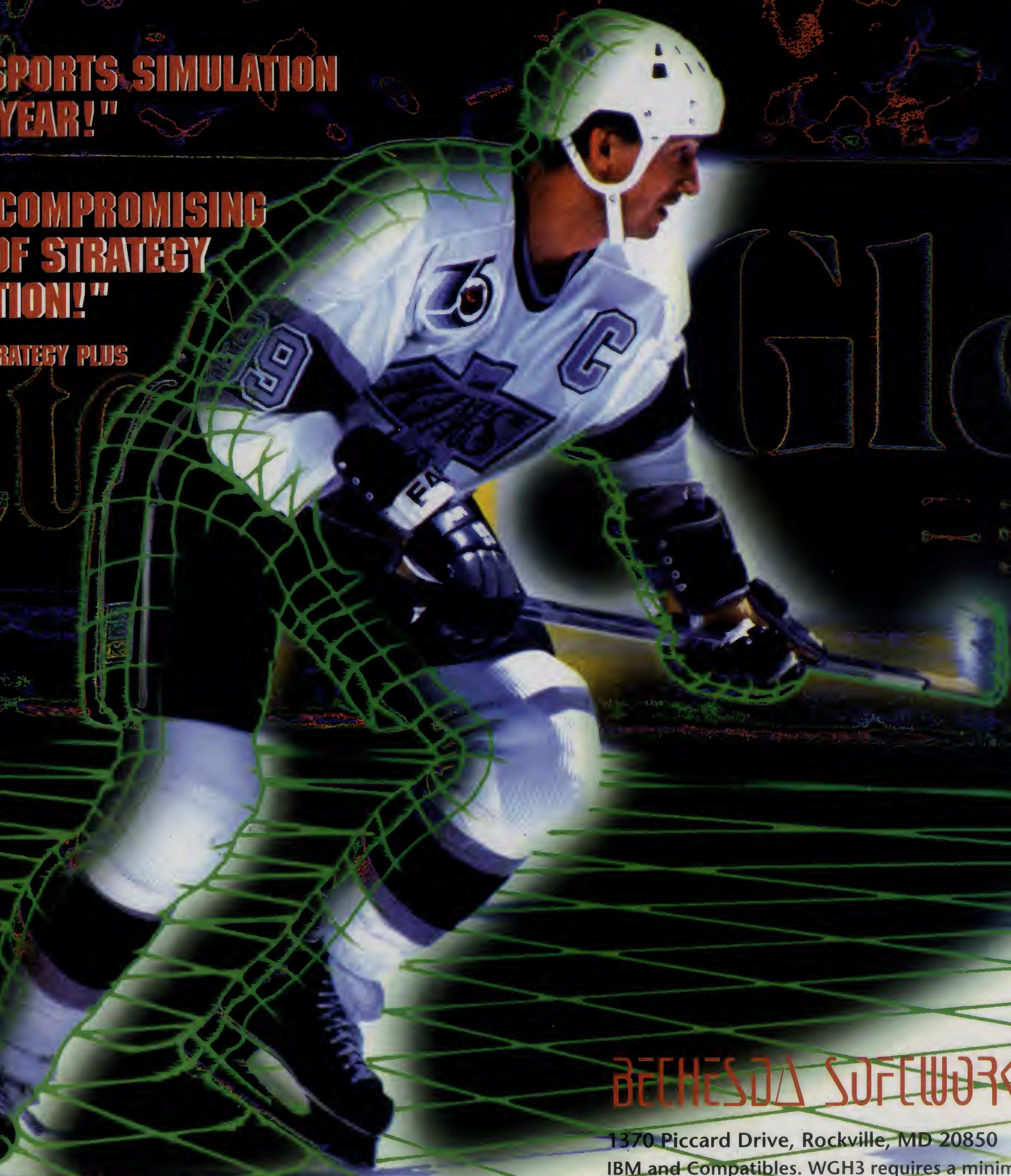
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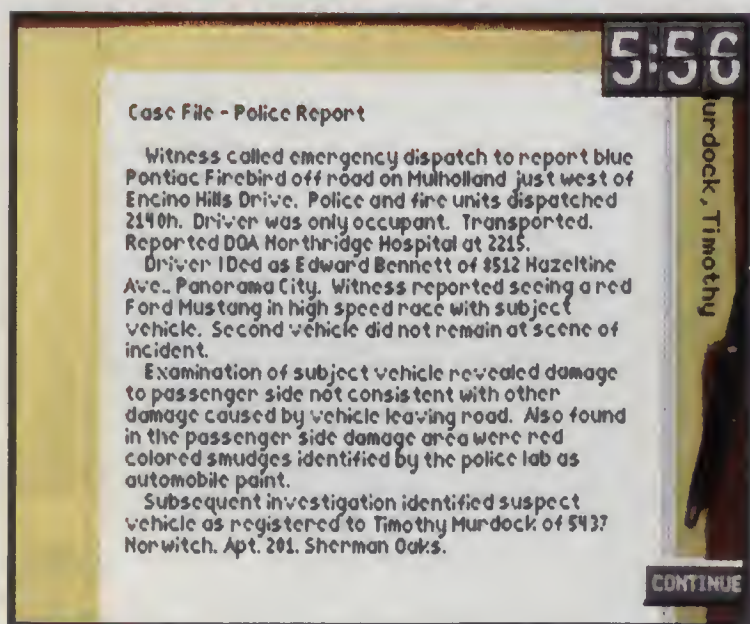
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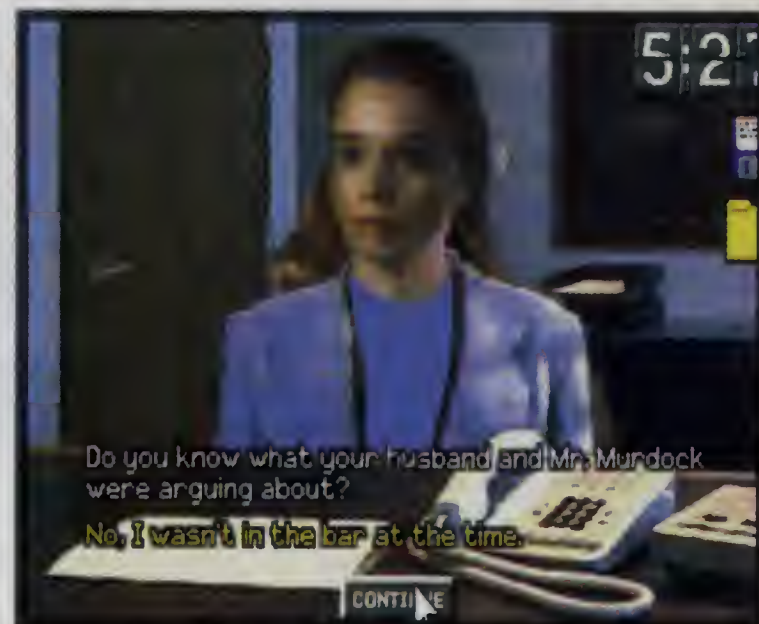
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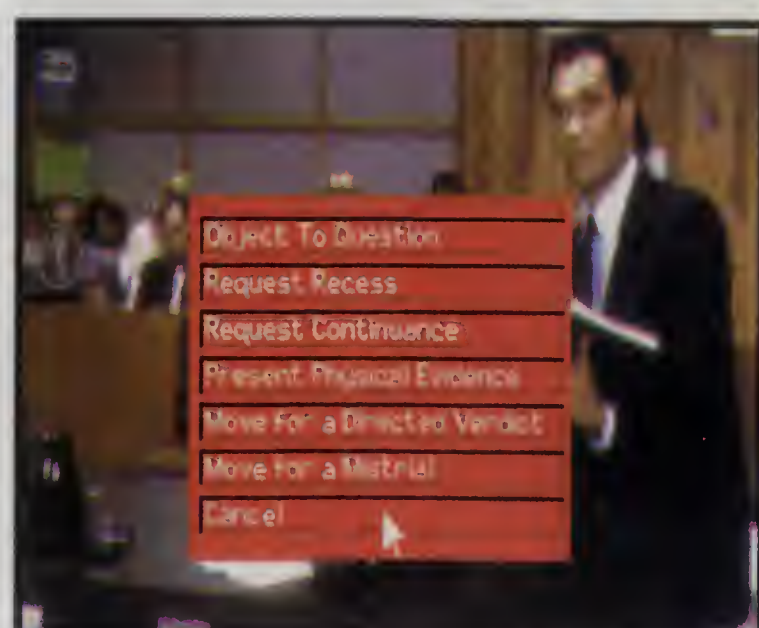
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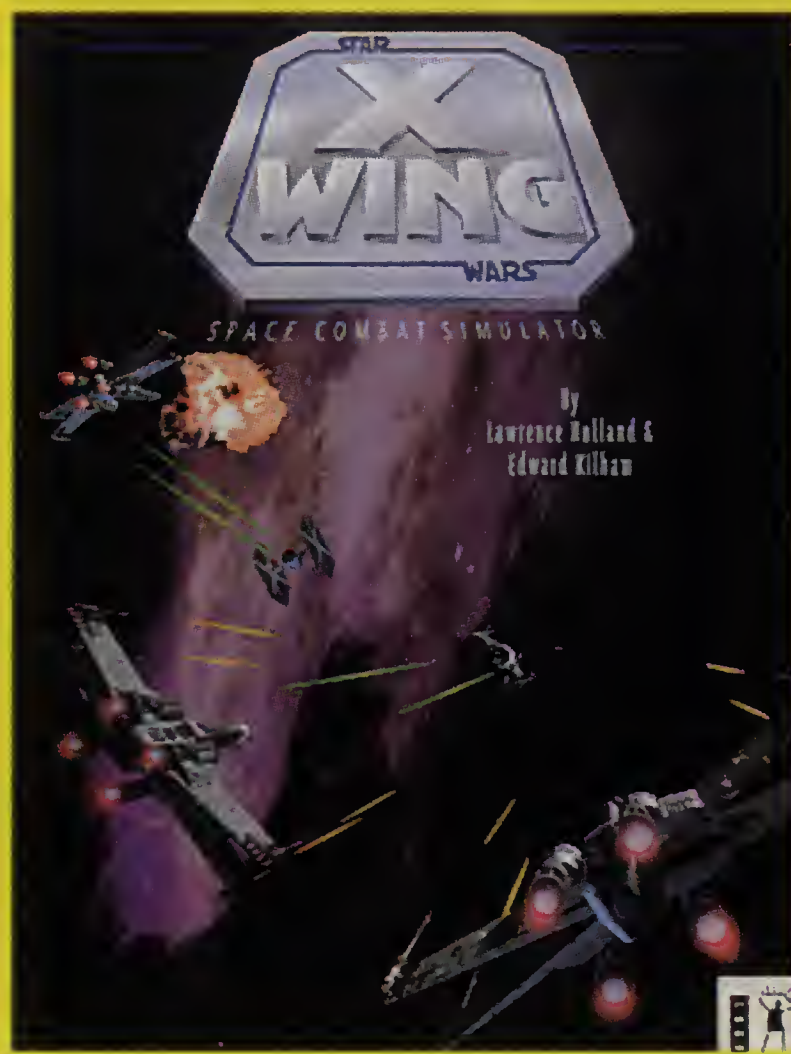
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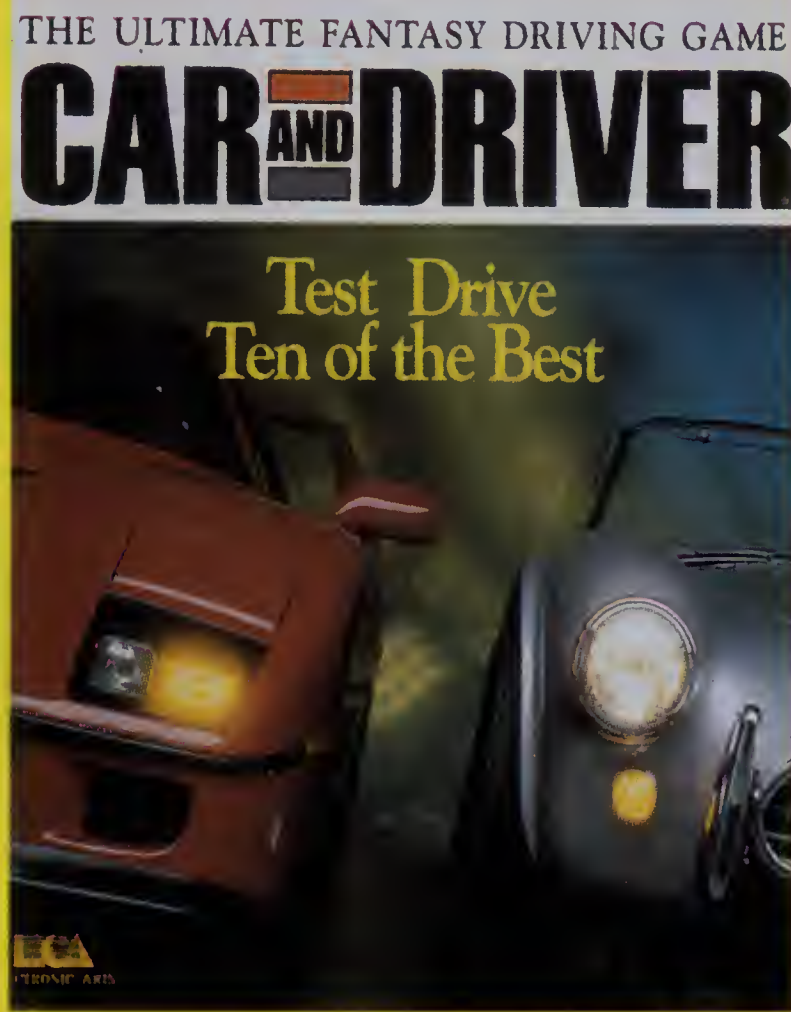
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Mouse, most
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Players
1-2

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Richard Lawrence calls the plays in Konami's NFL Videopro Football and Dynamix' Front Page Sports Football

Another year, another season - both of real football and its various computer simulations. As of this writing the real season is about half through, but the ongoing flood of computer games attempting to catch the essence of football continues with no end in sight. The original premise of this article was to do a 'head to head' comparison, in keeping with the sports competition spirit, between two of the new offerings on the market, Konami's **NFL Videopro Football (NVF)** and Dynamix' **Front Page Sports Football (FPSF)**. Unfortunately, apart from being a mismatch, that would be a terrible injustice to one perfectly good game. Rather like comparing the Redskins - a hard playing, serious team, to the American Gladiators, who look flashy and, well... look flashy. But as our editor gets in a tiff if his instructions are ignored, a comparison it shall be.

Video prose

Konami's **NVF** is huge, as big as the average hard drive of three to four years ago. More than 20 megabytes of hard disk will fall prey to the extensive multimedia effects of this game. After installation, one of the first sights to be seen is a graphics screen resembling the front page of a sports section in a newspaper. From here one can view team standings, access rosters, view league leaders or 'go to the studio' to start the game. Teams are actual NFL names, but player rosters are fictitious (sharing only the jersey numbers with real teams). Rosters can be edited, as well as changing attributes for individual players (using generic ratings like hands, running, etc.)

The only option of significance here is 'go studio,' which moves the player to the main phase of the game. The Studio is

a view resembling a network studio on game day, with all 14 matchups on mini screens. Any game in progress can be selected by clicking on it with the mouse. Three control buttons allow the player to go back to the Sports Page, get statistics on the game, or go to the stadium to view the game in progress.

After going to the stadium, the player can control a team by calling the plays using a mouse based playbook. There is no control of individual players. After the play is called, the computer will pick an animation of actual NFL footage that it thinks closely resembles the call, and show it in a center screen, with audio commentary. This animation is supposed to be the 'meat' of the game and make the player feel in control of an actual NFL team.

Unfortunately, this game is hampered by conventional storage requirements. This means that all of the animations shown appear to be from a Raiders-Chargers game, are fairly low resolution, and can't always exactly replicate the play called. It can be disconcerting to call a flea flicker and watch an entirely conventional run play on the screen.

Hold the front page

This approach to football simulation keeps the player interested for about two to three minutes. After that, it's tiresome to watch endless plays of the Raiders vs. Chargers regardless of which game is being 'controlled'. There seems to be little intelligence to the computer opponent, compensated by the fact that play results appear to be more or less random (as a few minutes of two player action proved, by deliberately calling bad defenses). If MTV were to produce a football game, it would be **NVF** - nice graphics, no substance.

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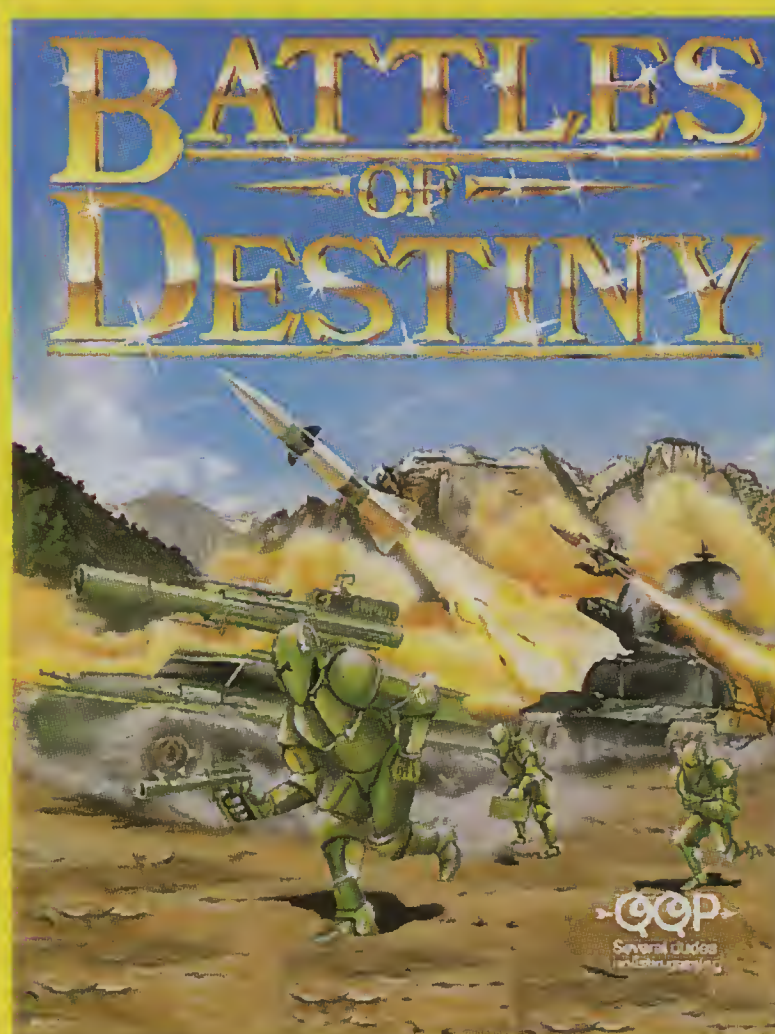
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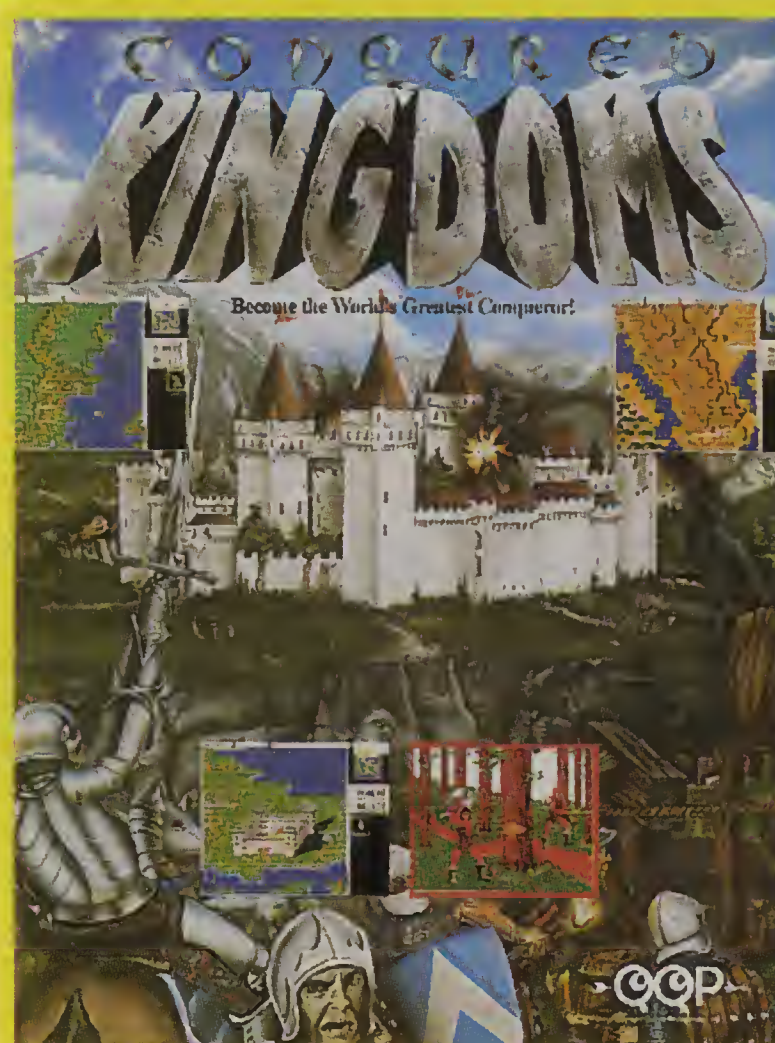
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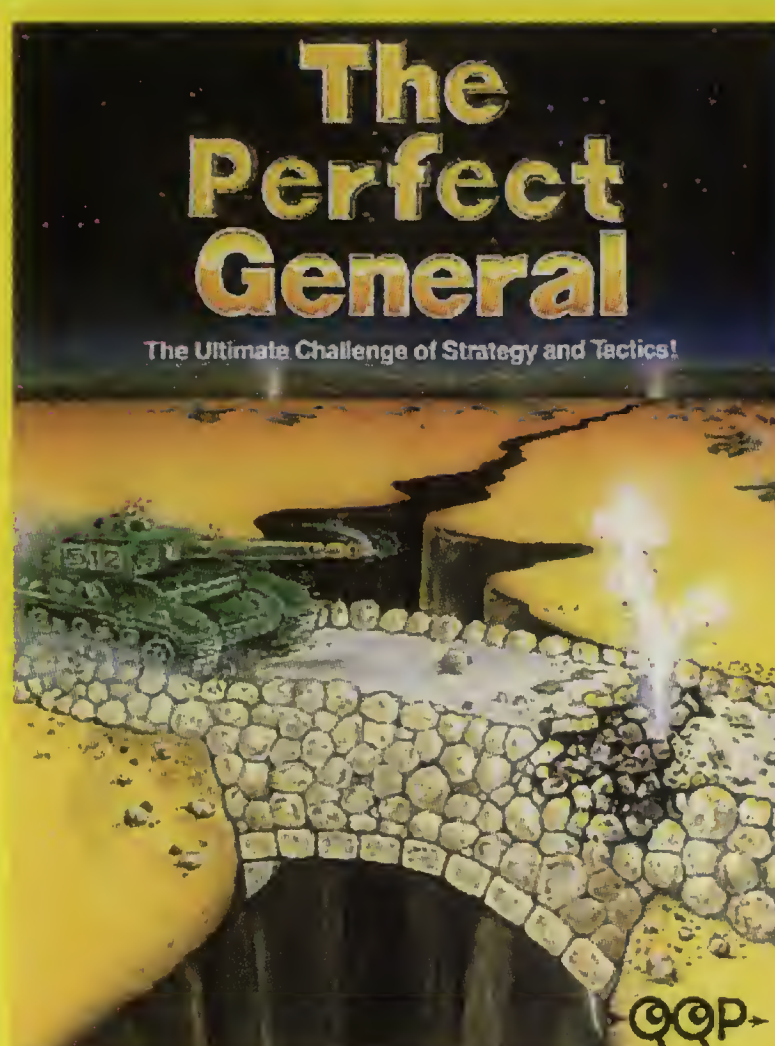
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Front Page Sports Football

It would be a nice segue to say that Dynamix' **FPSF** was the direct opposite of **NVF**, but it's not - the Dynamix game has good graphics too. They aren't digitized, but they are well done, and surrounded by possibly the best football game available today.

The program is fairly average in system requirements, using 8MB of disk space, 2MB of RAM, and more or less requiring a joystick or mouse (keyboard control is difficult). It supports a variety of sound cards, and splits graphics usage between VGA high resolution (for control menus, etc.) and 320 by 200 for game action.

Diving in

From the main control menu, the player can choose to Quick Start (dive directly into a game, with teams and a level of control specified from a separate menu); Exhibition Play (any two teams, configurable as in Quick Start, but with the inclusion of custom game plans); or League Play. Leagues can be of several sizes, and can include real teams or ones created entirely by the player.

Any of these options eventually lead the player to an actual game, and it is here, of course, that any football simulation is made or broken. **FPSF** starts play selection by presenting both the offensive and defensive play books on the screen. The player can select from eight different sets of plays by clicking on corresponding buttons to the left or right of the main display. After selecting a particular set (plays are logically organized into sets - one for short passing, one for runs, one for long passing, etc.) the four plays of the set will be represented in graphical boxes.

The level of representation is dependent on a configuration setting called Playcalling mode, which nicely allows the player to change the display to taste - in Basic Mode, the play is described in simple english, in Standard Mode the play is diagrammed with motion paths, and in Advanced Mode just the numerical number of the play is shown (good for two player games with a customized playbook that the player knows well).

After the play is called, a view is shown from slightly behind and above the current quarterback (the same view is shown even if the player is controlling defense). Players are

represented by bit-mapped images that are extremely well done, with fluid motion and fairly realistic response. Especially visually appealing is the tackling and running, which gives the player the feeling of watching over actual footage with its realism. When a player gets tackled hard in **FPSF**, one can *see* the hard hit as opposed to a trip or stumbling running back.

Control of players is best performed through the joystick. The level of control is again configurable, from Basic (coaching only), to Standard (computer runs until the player takes control) and finally Advanced (the player does most everything). In Advanced Mode, offense starts with the quarterback snapping the ball. The player can wait for the hand off and control a running back in a running play, or as the quarterback set up the pass. When passing, joystick button B rotates through available receivers, and A throws the ball. This system closely resembles the actual process of a QB checking off receivers in a real game. A quick tap on the A button throws a bullet pass, while a longer hold results in a lob. The player can then wait for the pass to reach the receiver and run with the ball from their.

Real scores

Despite their relative simplicity, these game mechanics take a fair amount of game play to master. The end result is quite satisfying, however, as the player feels integral to the game, enough to make a difference on any given play but not enough to violate the realism of the simulation. Game play is wonderfully realistic compared to many simulations available - reflected by scores that closely resemble those of any given Sunday in the real game.

One can easily get lost in the highly enjoyable play module of this game and forget that there's more to it than that. Indeed, Dynamix has pulled out all the stops in configurability with **FPSF**. Besides the already mentioned play modes (allowing the player to mix and match how involved the play calling and execution are distinctly from each other), there is complete league management system, with an extensive system of personnel management. Within a league, team members can be traded, free agents can be signed, and players can be put on injured reserve (or recalled). They even age and retire, which is offset by a simulated draft!

Computer managed teams are represented with different 'personalities' - aggressive, conservative, passing, etc. Further, this play philosophy can change based on previous performance, showing that computer is more than just a random number generator. It wouldn't be difficult at all with the Dynamix system to set up a complete fantasy football league.

After a team has been completely customized, naturally the one will want to design special plays to take advantage of its strengths. Enter the provided Play Editor, a click menu and graphics based system that allows just about anything that can be done with the ball represented for future use.

In short, Dynamix has done an astounding job with **Front Page Sports Football**. The money for this game will be well spent, as it offers enough depth and complexity for the ardent enthusiast and plenty of fun for the casual gamer as well. Just about the only thing missing is actual NFL names and rosters, and a modem play option. Even without these, Dynamix is the best combination of action and coaching available on the market today. □

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WILDLIFE ADVENTURES

Judith Weller investigates the complex world of bugs

Within the last few months four major software companies have released eagerly anticipated RPGs, but their resulting experiences have been very different. Why are two of these companies happily answering gamers questions on the major bulletin boards, while the other two are embroiled in an increasingly acrimonious debate? Or indeed, why is anyone having to answer questions at all, why can't the product just ship and that be the end of it?

A partial answer to this question is testing. I think that most players recognize that occasionally there are 'buglets' in games. However, a 'fix' which contains almost one megabyte of code, or a disk exchange involving all seven original game disks, indicate something more than a few minor flaws, they are acknowledgements of *major* flaws.

The stress factor

Good testing is both an art and a science and should be given the same prominence in a company as is given to programming. If both are not done well the result is a disaster. All companies believe in testing, but the methodology varies. At the most basic level every programmer in some fashion or another tests his part of the code. Or if not the programmer himself then someone in the test department. This level of testing is often called unit testing, or FVT (Functional verification testing). What this really comes down to is that when my PC goes through, say, dungeon A, all the scheduled monsters pop out and button plates and/or teleporters work according to the plan.

Whoever is managing the testing area must see that tests are designed which stress every part of the code in that particular area. However, just because all the code works in areas a, b, c etc. of dungeon X, does not mean, or in no way implies that dungeon X is playable. Moving the party from area A to B, for example, could turn out to be unattainable; the game crashes, PC locks up etc. Testing *must* include the integration of all the parts. If there is not a good integrated test plan then the ensuing product is headed for major problems.

Sir-Tech is in the enviable position of having one person, D W Bradley, design and unit test almost all of both **Wizardry 6** and **Wizardry 7**. Also, testers both outside and inside the company were used to beta test **Wizardry 7**. While the number of testers was not large, they were nevertheless devoted. This enabled Sir Tech to produce two big games that

were virtually bug free. But very few software houses have an individual person doing all the coding himself, the one-man team is a luxury few companies can afford. Most software houses have programming teams but quality control in a team environment is much harder to manage.

Clouds are clean

Origin (**Ultima 7**), Microprose (**Darklands**) and New World Computing (**Clouds of Xeen**) all have in-house test departments. New World Computing had some severe problems a year ago with **Might & Magic III**—many reviewers considered the initial release of the game unwinnable and unplayable due to various bugs which prevented the solution of certain problems. New World contend that, though there were bugs present in the game, the correct answers were available in other areas of the game so that charge was unwarranted.

However, as a result of the problems with **MM3**, New World did make changes in their in-house testing department to prevent the reoccurrence of similar problems. The number of in-house testers was increased, and the unit test of the various functional areas into which '**Xeen**' was divided, was rotated in such a manner that every tester played each area. The effect was to produce a much cleaner game in **Clouds of Xeen**. Even more testers are being added for the next game in this series. New World indicated that they had tried outside testing firms, but had problems getting the work done on time or the reports sent back. They felt that they had to spend too much time chasing after the company to get the test results, hence the fact that testing is now kept in-house

Voodoo

Origin Systems, however, made several serious mistakes in their **Ultima 7** release. They modified and enhanced their game-engine and in a burst of egotism proclaimed that all memory managers of currently available operating systems were inadequate, and that **Ultima 7** would have its own memory manager, the aptly named Voodoo. This turned into a horrifying experience for both gamers and publisher alike. Origin lacked the operating level experience needed to produce their own memory manager. The consequence of this was that all kinds of

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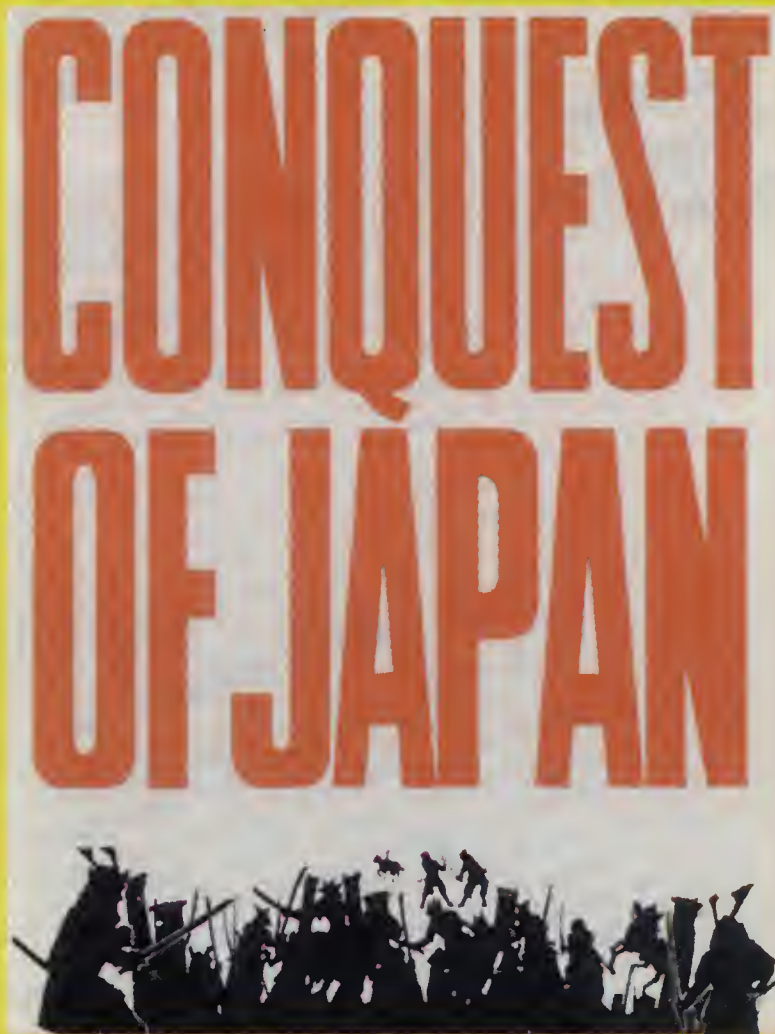
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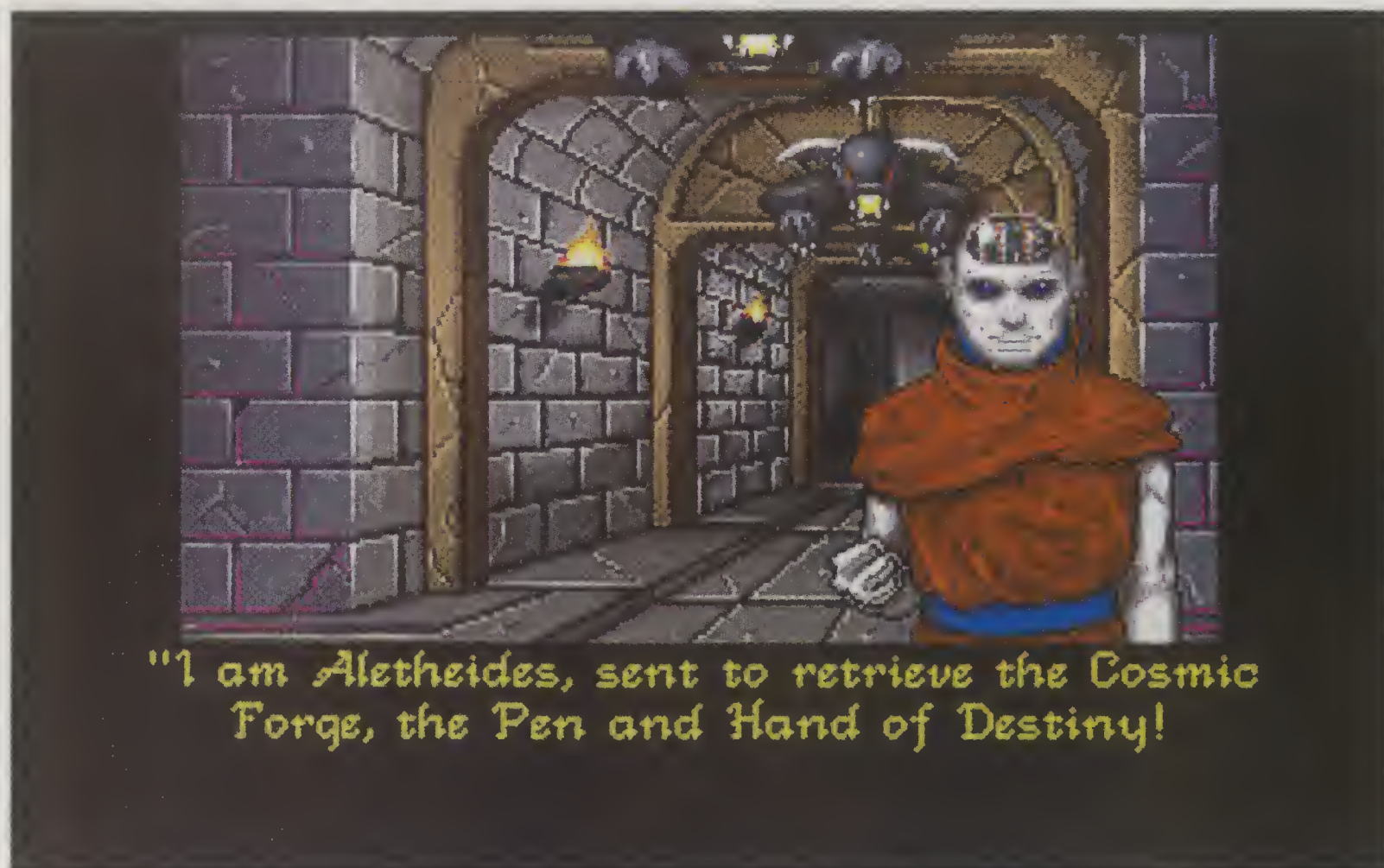
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Wizardry 7: bug free

peculiar problems showed up in the game—disappearing walls, all red screens, areas that should have opened stayed shut. The list is unending. The entire testing of the game was done in-house. At a recent conference Richard Garriot acknowledged that there were some in-house limitations to testing and in the future Origin would be considering using professional testing companies.

Microprose had similar problems with **Darklands**. It was way behind schedule and like most software that is behind schedule it was also over budget. The game had been advertised over two years ago. It was finally scheduled for release in June, but new problems were discovered requiring code modifications and yet more testing. It was finally released in September. Within a week of the game's distribution, fixes approaching close to 1 Mb in size were up-loaded to the major on-line services to fix the problems which occurred almost immediately upon playing the game.

Since a considerable lead time is required for disk duplication, packaging, and distribution of any software package, it is not uncommon for companies to let something be released with buglets, knowing that fixes will be available by the time the software gets into consumer hands.

Unfortunately for Microprose their V.53 up-load not only did not fix all the problems, but actually caused some new ones. Hence one month later a V 6.0 showed up, and a Version 7.0 is currently being worked on. To prevent future problems, Microprose has also increased their in-house testing staff. At one point they had used outside testers who came highly recommended, but after unauthorised up-loads to various bulletin boards of the games those individuals were testing, Microprose ended all external testing and has no plans at this time to resume it.

Consumer report

The approach of Origin and Microprose to handling the consumer complaints has been very different. At first, Origin stonewalled the problem and called elements like disappearing keys 'a feature.' When they finally owned up to the problems, they insisted that *all* disks be returned and exchanged for Version 3.4. When asked why the fix could not

be up-loaded to the major on-line networks, the reply was that it was 'too big' and involved changes to every disk. However, shortly afterwards they released a 1.44MB diskette which contained not only the Version 3.4 upgrade for U7, but also the add-on game **Forge of Virtue**.

No satisfactory explanation has ever come from Origin as to why they could put the upgrade plus an add-on module on a single 1.44MB diskette, yet could not up-load anything to a major on-line service. Origin is still insisting that users return all 7 disks to receive the upgrade, or buy the **Forge of Virtue** add-on disk. Origin is basically expecting the consumer to stand part of the cost of their own mistakes.

Microprose, on the other hand, has chosen to 'take its lumps' and has not only up-loaded all upgrades to the major on-line networks, but has also sent out upgrade diskettes at their own expense to individuals who registered their copy of the game. At least they made the warranty card useful for something other than promotional literature, which is all that Origin appear to use theirs for.

The net result of all of this is that the major companies have to recognize the necessity of increasing the number of in-house testing staff as well as, in some cases, turning to outside testing companies. While I think that all these measures will mean fewer bugs in the future, it will never eliminate them altogether. The newer generation of games appearing on store shelves are huge affairs, promising randomly generated worlds and infinite replayability. By their very nature, these games are doomed to have more problems than the older linear games ever had. It may be impossible to test all combinations and permutation of these randomly generated worlds and adventures.

Stacking the odds

To make the situation even more complex and troublesome there is such a wide variety of PC hardware and system software out there, some of which may prove to be incompatible with any given game. I have noticed that for every new game, there is always at least one or more persons who are unable to load the game and play it. So not all the problems with games are due to buggy software. Although almost every major game has had at least one fix for it up-loaded to the on-line services.

I asked New World if they tried to test various combinations of hardware/ software system platforms. They said that they did not. They felt that the fact that they owned a large number of PCs by different companies would adequately address this problem. But in reality it did not. There was the compatibility problem with the Microsoft Disk Cache Smartdrv which resulted in corrupted save games in **MM3**.

Microprose, on the other hand, said that they made a conscious effort to test on a wide variety of hardware/system software platforms to determine the compatibility of their games with products like QEMM and Stacker.

Unfortunately I think that while changes in testing procedures will do a great deal to improve the quality of games and eliminate the most egregious bugs, it will not make them bug free. Minor glitches are going to occur, especially as users load up their machines with OEM operating system tuners and space savers. These sort of programs often manipulate the operating system in a way that the game does not expect. And then, of course, its time to call technical support. □

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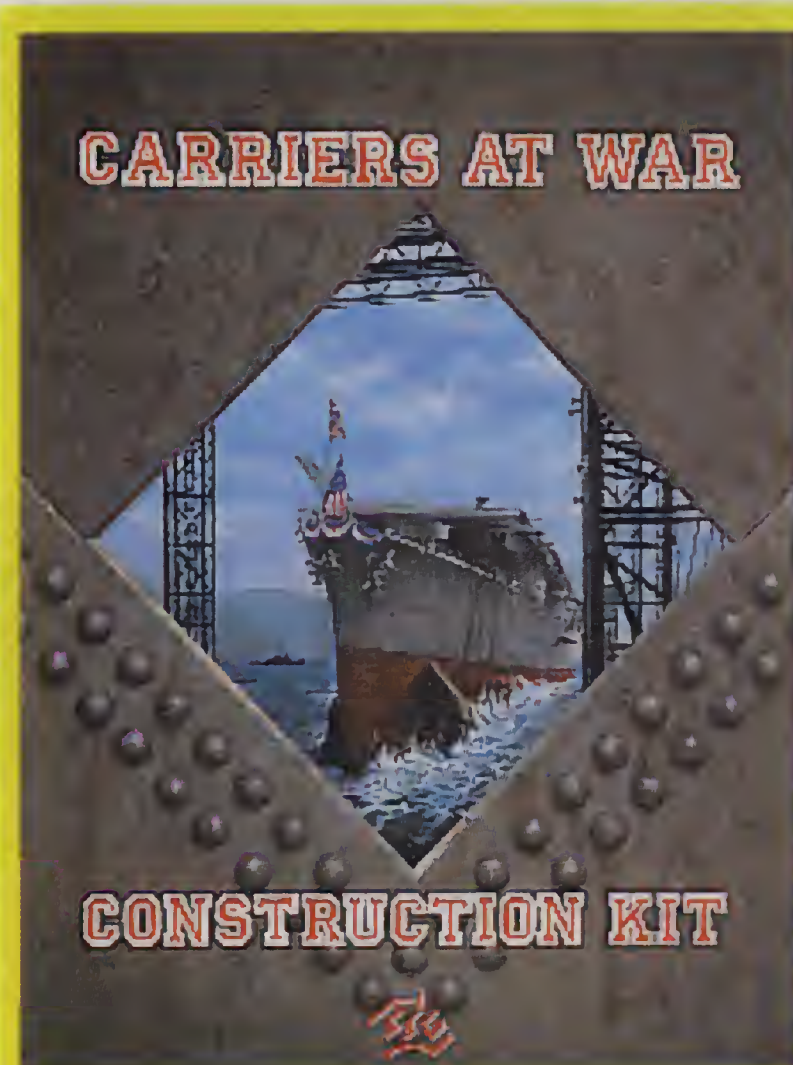
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Credibility gap

I am writing this letter to express my disappointment with your magazine's review of the **Harpoon Designer Series (HDS)**, including the **Harpoon 1.3** upgrade, in issue 24. The review is inaccurate and does your readers a disservice by failing to point out the numerous flaws in this simulation.

I purchased the **HDS** partially in response because of the review by Sandy Eisen, but more so because of my experience with Three Sixty's products. When I installed **HDS** on my computer, I found it to be so bug ridden as to be almost unplayable. Now, lest you think my problem is unique, let me quote from a letter I received from Mr John Seale at Three Sixty: 'I realize that all of you have been very patient while we have been working on bug fixes for **Harpoon 1.3**. I can tell you now that we have almost finished with **Harpoon 1.32**.'

Obviously then, the problems with this program are widespread and recognized by the manufacturer. To Mr Seale's credit, he responded to my letter of concern within days, thus confirming in my mind Three Sixty's dedication to their product and customers. One might ask why they released such a bug ridden product to begin with, but that is another subject.

The reason I am writing to you is to ask why should I ever buy another copy of your magazine? Obviously, your reviewer didn't report on any of the bugs in the program, bugs that are readily admitted to by the manufacturer. If you are going to publish incomplete and misleading reviews, why should I bother to read them? Until this incident I had really enjoyed your magazine, but this puts your credibility in question.

I think you owe it to your readers to ensure the accuracy of what you print. If I have misunderstood some aspect of the review process then I apologize. However, if the review was based on an incomplete assessment, or perhaps a beta-test example of the program, then you owe your readers an apology.

Robert Black

Winnipeg, Manitoba,
Canada

Sandy Eisen replies: Yes, I did discover a few bugs in HDS, but since upgrading to a 486 I have always had Harpoon bugs, especially when using Soundblaster. This has probably become worse since I installed Stacker on my hard drive and started using QEMM. Since I did not have problems on my old 386 with Harpoon, I assumed the problem was my own overcomplex hardware/software configuration. This is the reason I didn't mention it in the review. To be perfectly honest, if the software is exciting enough I can learn to live with a few bugs if the company concerned brings out regular fixes, as Three Sixty do.

Summons

I am writing to you in regards to a review by Joseph Boone of **The Summoning** which

appeared in your November issue. Even though most of the review was positive, Mr Boone makes a harsh comment about the use of hand signals without names for the magic system. The review does not state that he is playing a beta version. He makes no disclaimer that the game may change or that he is playing without a finished manual.

I bought the game when it hit the shelves. At the back of the manual is a page which shows all the hand signals with a letter assigned to each. Whenever a scroll is found one simply notes the letters for the matching hand signals. There is no need to hold the scrolls in one's inventory.

Why does this Mr Boone make this erroneous negative comment? When reading the review one immediately assumes that he is playing the version that it being shipped to the stores. You have to realize that comments like he made can aid in making or breaking a game. Don't give me all that crap that word of mouth will propel sales if the game is really good. Magazines such as yours can have the most dramatic impact on the sales of games and if you are inaccurately reviewing games, those that really stink will naturally fall by the wayside.

R K

Aurora, IL 60656

The game itself was final, though the manual was not. Our reviewer thought it was. This was how the error occurred. The 'harsh comment' to which you refer, was a statement that the magic system used a 'questionable approach'. The review of The Summoning concluded that few games, of its type this year, 'will be any better.' Let's try and keep a sense of perspective.

Choked

Have the boys at *Strategy Plus* been staring at their terminals too long? Has a degree of waywardness crept, almost imperceptibly, into articles ostensibly about computer games? Is the **Sex Olympics** ad emanating deadly, mind-enslaving radiations, thereby compelling once renowned game reviewers to drown amid the frothiest sentiments regarding, of all things, sex? The answer: Yes!!!

Not that I mind all that much - but rarely do I peer into my mailbox hoping to receive the latest issue, that it might enlighten me with the boiled egg version of somebody's Great Theory of Western Culture. Despite this magazine's many and considerable attractions, there is something distinctly out of place about such efforts. I am referring, of course, to that very trend which climaxed (ahem) in Mr Wartofsky's review of **Cobra Mission**. Oh, right, was that really a review? Were we being informed of that games merits/failings through some osmosis-like process (imparted, perhaps, via that enormous screen shot which we were meant to paw over)? Of course, I'm being unfair, nearly half the review was actually spent on, well, reviewing something.

Now don't get me wrong. A digression, even a lecture, is not in itself a bad thing, and it's not that I have anything against a dissertation on current trends in the computer game industry, but one could fairly hear the groans of effort as the reviewer set about getting all those gigantic wheels of thought into motion with the intention of bringing light to all those far-off regions those provincial townships, those scattered territories in the great expanse of civilization. Alright, alright, I'm being a smart-alek.

The point to all this being that, while some of what Mr Wartofsky offered us is, indeed, food for thought, there was a line or two which loudly screamed, 'Blue pencil me! Blue pencil me! I am totally irrelevant. That in mind, I continued to be amazed at the unflagging quality - Mr Wartofsky's other articles being quite exemplary in this regard - which you maintain so that we can all shameless harangue you, in the manner of this letter.

But, when the urge comes upon you, as it comes upon all of us to pontificate about matters of dubious concern or significance or validity to all the rest of the world, it would probably not be out of line to contain your evangelical instincts, and perhaps (I apologize for this one), *choke them off* at the source.

Brian Uecker

Yankton, SD 57078

Carrier Defence

Although letters to *Strategy Plus* seem to be a little rarer these days, those which do appear frequently complain about a reviewer's treatment of a game on a subject of interest to the writer. The last one I read complained about one of my reviews.

Now the boot is on the other foot and I feel impelled to write in defence of **Carriers at War**.

Stuart Mitchell's review of **Carriers at War** in issue 24 damns the game with such faint praise that many readers with an interest in Pacific WWII carrier battles may be wondering whether or not to buy the game.

I do not intend to attempt to review **CAW** in a short letter; the game is anyway quite well described and mostly praised in detail. However the reviewer just seems to fail to enjoy and appreciate this milestone in historical wargaming.

The bottom line is that **Carriers at War** offers players superb history, presented from the point of view of the contemporary commanders, via an excellent interface, and with a challenging opponent. The graphics are better than **Harpoon**; the interface is at least as good; the AI/orders system is clearly superior. **Carriers at War** sets a new standard for serious wargaming and deserves the same success as **Harpoon**. It is also more fun to play!

Sandy Eisen

London N20,
UK

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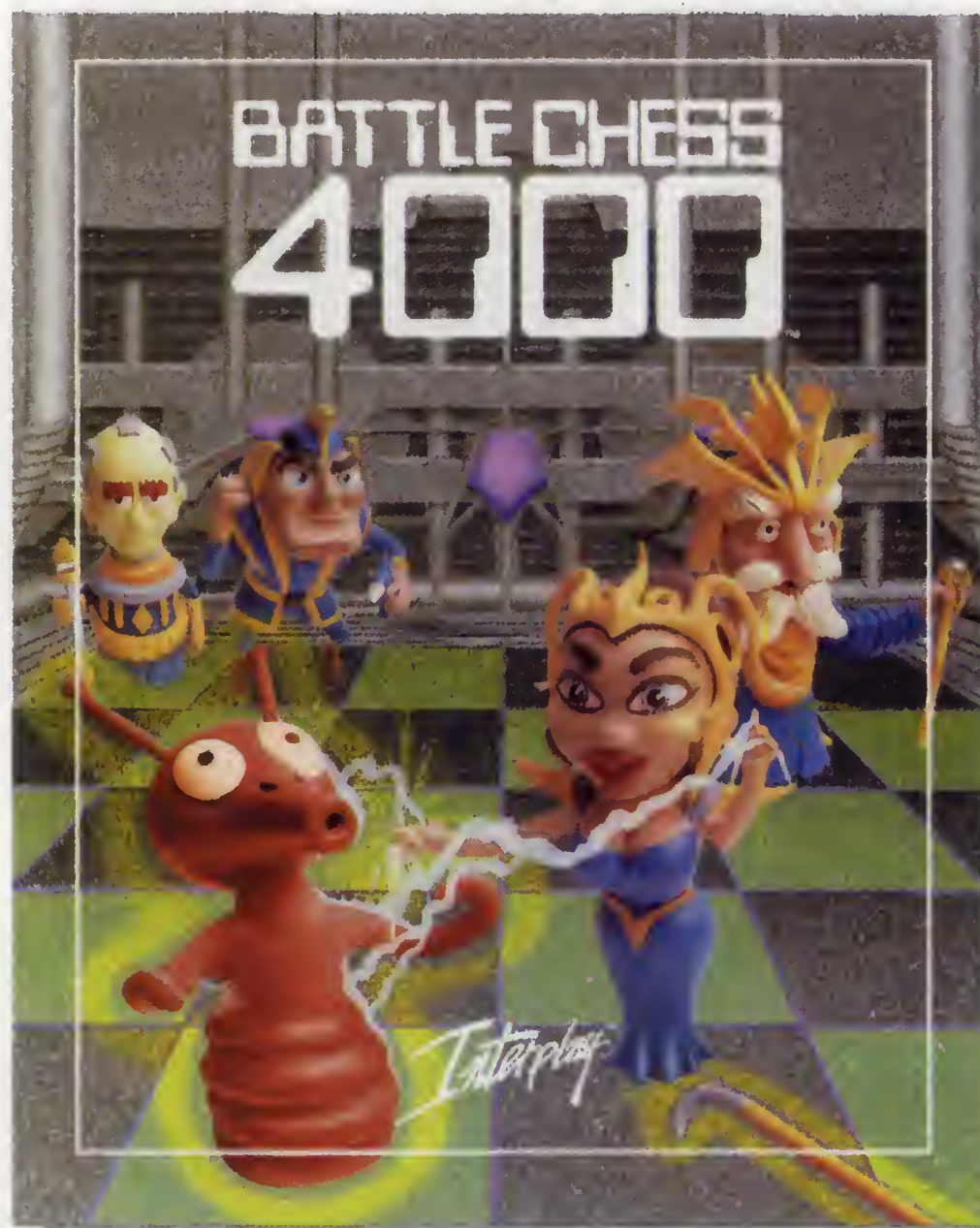
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